



O P E R A O M N I A V O L . VI.1

RAIMON PANIKKAR

CULTURES AND
RELIGIONS IN
DIALOGUE

PART ONE

Pluralism and Interculturality

Opera Omnia

Volume VI

Cultures and Religions in Dialogue

Part One

Pluralism and Interculturality

Opera Omnia

I. Mysticism and Spirituality

Part 1: Mysticism, Fullness of Life

Part 2: Spirituality, the Way of Life

II. Religion and Religions

III. Christianity

Part 1: The Christian Tradition (1961–1967)

Part 2: A Christophany

IV. Hinduism

Part 1: The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari

Part 2: The Dharma of India

V. Buddhism

VI. Cultures and Religions in Dialogue

Part 1: Pluralism and Interculturality

Part 2: Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

VII. Hinduism and Christianity

VIII. Trinitarian and Cosmotheandric Vision

IX. Mystery and Hermeneutics

Part 1: Myth, Symbol, and Ritual

Part 2: Faith, Hermeneutics, and Word

X. Philosophy and Theology

Part 1: The Rhythm of Being

Part 2: Philosophical and Theological Thought

XI. Sacred Secularity

XII. Space, Time, and Science

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SERIES FOREWORD

All the writings it is my privilege and responsibility to present in this series are not the fruit of mere speculation but, rather, autobiographical—that is, they were first inspired by a life and praxis that have been only subsequently molded into writing.

This *Opera Omnia* ranges over a span of some seventy years, during which I dedicated myself to exploring further the meaning of a more justified and fulfilled human lifetime. I did not live for the sake of writing, but I wrote to live in a more conscious way so as to help my fellows with thoughts not only from my own mind but also springing from a superior Source, which may perhaps be called Spirit—although I do not claim that my writings are in any way inspired. However, I do not believe that we are isolated monads, but that each of us is a microcosm that mirrors and impacts the macrocosm of reality as a whole—as most cultures believed when they spoke of the Body of Śiva, the communion of the saints, the Mystical Body, *karman*, and so forth.

The decision to publish this collection of my writings has been somewhat trying, and more than once I have had to overcome the temptation to abandon the attempt, the reason being that, though I fully subscribe to the Latin saying *scripta manent*, I also firmly believe that what actually matters in the final analysis is to live out Life, as witnessed by the great masters who, as Thomas Aquinas remarks in the *Summa* about Pythagoras and Socrates (but not about Buddha, of whom he could not have known), did not write a single word.

In the twilight of life I found myself in a dark forest, for the straight path had been lost and I had shed all my certainties. It is undoubtedly to the merit of Sante Bagnoli, and of his publishing house Jaca Book, that I owe the initiative of bringing out this *Opera Omnia*, and all my gratitude goes to him. This work includes practically all that has appeared in book form, although some chapters have been inserted into different volumes as befitted their topics. Numerous articles have been added to present a more complete picture of my way of thinking, but occasional pieces and almost all my interviews have been left out.

I would like to make some practical comments which apply to all the volumes:

1. In quoting references, I have preferred to cite my previously published works following the general scheme of my publications.
2. Subject matter rather than chronology has been considered in the selection, and thus the style may sometimes appear uneven.
3. Even if each of these works aspires to be a self-sufficient whole, some ideas recur because they are functional to understanding the text, although the avoidance of unnecessary duplication has led to a number of omissions.
4. The publisher's preference for the *Opera Omnia* to be put into an organic whole by the author while still alive has many obvious positive features. Should the author outlive the printer's run, however, he will be hard put to help himself from introducing alterations, revisions, or merely adding to his original written works.

I thank my various translators, who have rendered the various languages I have happened to write in into the spirit of multiculturalism—which I believe is ever relevant in a world

where cultures encounter each other in mutual enrichment, provided they do not mislay their specificity. I am particularly grateful to Milena Carrara Pavan, to whom I have entrusted the publication of all my written works, which she knows deeply, having been at my side in dedication and sensitivity during the last twenty years of my life.

R.P.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xi</i>
---------------------------	-----------

SECTION I: PLURALISM

1. THE MYTH OF PLURALISM: THE TOWER OF BABEL— A MEDITATION ON NONVIOLENCE.....	3
The Problem of Pluralism	4
<i>Irreducibility of the Praxis to Theoria</i>	4
<i>Importance of the Problem</i>	6
<i>Genesis of the Problem</i>	7
<i>Pluralism Is Meaningless (Uniformity)</i>	7
<i>Pluralism Amounts to Plurality (Difference)</i>	7
<i>Pluralism Means Pluriformity (Variety)</i>	7
<i>Pluralism Connotes Unattainable Harmony (Diversity)</i>	8
Approaches to Pluralism	8
<i>The Philosophical Approach</i>	8
<i>Monism</i>	9
<i>Dualism</i>	9
<i>A-Dualism</i>	10
<i>The Phenomenological Approach</i>	12
<i>The Historical-Political Failure</i>	12
<i>The Philosophical-Dialectical Failure</i>	13
<i>The Religio-Cultural Failure</i>	14
<i>The Anthropological Approach</i>	14
<i>Three Anthropological Chapters</i>	14
<i>Overcoming a Threefold Reductionism</i>	15
<i>Pluralistic Man</i>	17
<i>Aliud and Aliud</i>	17
<i>The Awareness of Otherness and of the Other: Aliud et Aliud</i>	18
<i>Dialogical Tension Instead of Dialectical Conflict</i>	19
<i>The Exigencies of Pluralism</i>	20
2. THE DEFIANCE OF PLURALISM.....	26
Clarification of the Notion of Pluralism	27
Methodological Remarks.....	33
Dialogical and Dialectical Response.....	34
3. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND PLURALISM	39
The Claim of Our Times	39
<i>The Past Hundred Years</i>	39
<i>The Aggressive Attitude</i>	40
<i>The Regressive Attitude</i>	40
<i>The Progressive Attitude</i>	40

<i>Role and Danger of Labels</i>	41
<i>The Present Situation</i>	41
Pluralism.....	42
<i>Some Definitions</i>	42
<i>Pluralism between Monism and Dualism</i>	42
<i>Pluralism Is Not Sheer Plurality</i>	42
<i>Pluralism Is Irreducible to Unity—Even of a Higher Order</i>	43
<i>Pluralism Stands between Unity and Plurality</i>	43
Religious Identity.....	45
<i>The Question</i>	45
<i>Personal Identity</i>	46
<i>Religious Belonging</i>	48
<i>The Heart</i>	49
<i>The Mind</i>	49
<i>The Spirit</i>	50
4. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: THE METAPHYSICAL CHALLENGE.....	53
Dramatis Personae.....	54
The Inadequacy of Monistic Answers.....	56
<i>Only One Religion Is True</i>	56
<i>All Religions Are Ultimately True</i>	57
<i>All Religions Are Equally False</i>	58
<i>Religion Is a Private Affair</i>	58
<i>Religions Are Historical Products</i>	59
The A-Dualistic Hypothesis.....	60
5. THE GOSPELS AND CULTURAL PLURALITY.....	66
6. PLURALISM, TOLERANCE, AND CHRISTIANITY.....	71
Description of the Theme.....	71
<i>Pluralism</i>	71
<i>Christendom</i>	72
<i>Tolerance</i>	73
Summary.....	73
<i>Microdoxy</i>	73
<i>Description</i>	73
<i>The Premises of Microdoxy</i>	74
<i>The Three Christian Spheres</i>	76
<i>Orthopraxis</i>	77
<i>Description</i>	78
<i>Applications</i>	79
The Concept of Christian Tolerance.....	80
<i>Tolerance as a Virtue</i>	80
<i>What Must a Christian Tolerate?</i>	81
<i>Considerations on Numerical Data</i>	82
<i>Consequences</i>	83
<i>The Consciousness of Easter</i>	83
<i>Contemplation</i>	83
<i>Ecumenical Ecumenism</i>	83
Conclusion.....	84

7.	THE INTERPELLATION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM	85
	Interpellation	85
	Theo(logy)	87
	Catholic (Theology)	90
	The Third Millennium	92
8.	SOME NOTES ON SYNCRETISM AND ECLECTICISM RELATED TO THE GROWTH OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS	94
	Terminological Introduction	94
	<i>The Ontonomy of Words</i>	94
	<i>Syncretism</i>	95
	<i>Eclecticism</i>	96
	<i>Syncretism and Eclecticism</i>	96
	Semantic Working Hypothesis	96
	<i>A Morphological Perspective</i>	96
	<i>A Historical Perspective</i>	97
	<i>Semantic Perspective</i>	97
	<i>The Semantic Difference</i>	98
	The Criterion of Growth	98
	<i>The Ambivalence of the Words</i>	98
	<i>The Category of Growth</i>	99
	<i>Syncretism, Eclecticism, and Growth</i>	100
9.	FROM A PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS TO A RELIGIOUS PLURALISM	103
	Philosophical Problems	105
	Theological Problems	105
	Sociological Problems	106
10.	ECUMENICAL AND CRITICAL ECUMENISM	108
	Toward an Ecumenical Ecumenism	108
	Critical Ecumenism	114

SECTION II: INTERCULTURALITY

11.	THREE IMPORTANT INTERCULTURAL INTERPELLATIONS	121
	Overcoming Analytical Thought	124
	Overcoming Conceptual Thought	125
	Overcoming Written Thought	127
	Appendix	130
12.	INTERCULTURAL ANTHROPOPHANY	132
	The Anthropological Paradox	132
	Intercultural Anthropophany	134
	<i>Epiphanic Phenomenology</i>	134
	<i>Three Anthropological Horizons</i>	135
	<i>Examples</i>	136
	Final Reflections	138
13.	TOWARD A THEORY OF INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS LIBERATION	140
	A Liberating Theology Must Begin with Liberation from Theology	140

	Interculturality Is Not Just Changing the Perspective of a Problem	141
	Interculturality Cannot Have a Super-Cultural Arbitrator.....	142
14.	RISING SUN AND SETTING SUN	144
15.	THE OTHER IS PART OF US.....	152
	The Other Cracks Our Individuality	153
	Interculturality Is a Historical Imperative	154
	A Heroic Transformation	156
	Armed Reason	157
16.	PEACE AND INTERCULTURALITY:	
	A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION	159
	Philosophy as an Overcoming of Cultural Boundaries,	
	Both Horizontal and Vertical.....	159
	Interculturality Is Neither Transdisciplinarity nor Multiculturalism	162
	Intercultural Attitudes	164
	Dialogal and Duologal Dialogue.....	169
	Intercultural Language.....	172
	The Starting Point	175
	Communion in the <i>Mythos</i>	180
	Is Science a Transcultural Language?	185
	The Intercultural Challenge	189
	Trust Instead of Certainty.....	195
	<i>Hieros Gamos</i> between Knowledge and Love	200
	Nine Sūtras on Peace	205
	<i>Glossary</i>	213
	<i>Index of Original Texts in This Volume</i>	217
	<i>Index of Names</i>	219
	<i>About the Author</i>	222

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this volume is of great importance and relevance for society today, which is so different from that of previous centuries. Both space and time have been relativized by science and technology as well as by the encounter among peoples and their traditions—an encounter that is becoming sharper and sharper and is creating clashes between civilizations and obstacles for mutual understanding.

The truth of one tradition clashes with that of another, and dialogue thus represents the only path toward survival, a theme that will be developed in the second book in this volume, *Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*.

The first book concerns pluralism and interculturality, the foundation for any possible understanding among peoples.

We have suffered so much at the hands of political, religious, and cultural fanaticism that now we quite rightly thirst for some kind of universal understanding. A typical example of this mentality is the global village syndrome. Noble though the intention may be, it is still the result of a colonialist mindset. Colonialism believes in uniformity of culture: in the end there is only one civilization, and the world is reduced to a "global village." Now the hope is for a universal theology that will create a small, comfortable corner for the Muslim, another for the nonbeliever, and so on, and everyone will be happy because we are tolerant, nothing is imposed, everything is accepted, and everyone has their place. A universal theology based on openness, tolerance, and self-criticism could be welcomed by virtually anyone. So far so good, but are we really sure it is that easy to be open with the fanatic, tolerant with the intolerant, and to accept criticism from those who do not agree with our universal theology?

And yet we still thirst for true understanding. We cannot live in a compartmentalized world. Others become a problem precisely because they break into my life and cannot be defined by my way of seeing things. If one extreme is to think that we are in the right and the others in error, another extreme is to think we are all suited to one type of global village. It is worth remembering that none of us can embrace the whole range of human experience. In a village, everyone knows everyone else, and they share in the problems of each member of the community. Do we really still dream that universal television can bring true "communication" among 6 billion people? There is clearly *mental inertia* evident in most attempts to deal with this problem. I suspect that we need to face up to a radically new vision of reality.

Between the two extremes there increasingly emerges the word *pluralism* in reference to a third approach, and this is the second point of my introduction.

Today a certain number of pluralisms are accepted. A philosopher can be a good philosopher without having to be a follower of Kant or anyone else. One philosopher may differ with another, but both may still be considered good philosophers. Philosophical pluralism is accepted, and in practice so is theological pluralism. Cultural pluralism, too, is something we boast of, although I am not sure it has been achieved. What has been achieved is a certain kind of cultural tolerance that accepts that Greeks, Pakistanis, and Gypsies have their own folklore. Perhaps we are ready, theoretically, to accept cultural pluralism, but religious pluralism, which cannot be separated from cultural pluralism, is probably the hardest notion to accept, because it touches our personal identity.

We have become aware of *plurality*; that is a fact. But plurality is not the same as pluralism. Plurality indicates the recognition of different forms, atmospheres, and colors.

A step further is *pluriformity*. There are not just differences but also *variety*. This is a qualitative idea. We become sensitive to forms of variety that cannot be measured quantitatively. Blue is not green, and you cannot say that green is more beautiful than blue. You cannot measure which is better or which is more beautiful. But this is still not pluralism.

Pluralism goes a step beyond the recognition of differences (plurality) and of variety (pluriformity). Pluralism has to do with radical *diversity*. This further step has two precursors.

The first step is *perspective*. Those who know the Indian story of the elephant in a dark place will remember how each person touches the elephant without seeing it and describes it differently—as a bone structure, as a heavy column, as a large container, as a rough skin, and so on. This might be a good example of perspective. People see things from different perspectives, and we have to respect them. The problem is, staying with our example, that someone needs to know it is, in fact, an elephant. If I know it is an elephant, I can say that someone is only describing the tusk, or the leg, or some other part, but if no one knows the elephant, how can we demonstrate the idea of perspective? And who knows the elephant? But of course, “we”—*vedānta*, Christians, scientists—“we” know what the elephant looks like!

The second step is *relativity*, not to be confused with relativism. Relativism is agnosticism that is self-defeating. You cannot even know that you do not know. If there are no criteria for discernment, then relativism cannot be such a criterion itself. Relativity, on the other hand, is a much more serious matter. Relativity tells us that all things depend on a series of situations in which a case, a statement, or a particular fact may be expressed, and also falsified, or verified or whatever. It precludes any kind of absolutist response. However, I would venture to say that pluralism, in its deepest sense, goes yet another step further, and I would like to make a brief description of it.

I shall try to summarize what I mean in six points:

1. Pluralism does not mean plurality or a reduction of plurality to unity. It is a fact that there is a plurality of religions. It is also a fact that these religions cannot be reduced to any sort of unity. Pluralism means something more than simple recognition of plurality and a pious desire for unity.
2. Pluralism does not consider unity an indispensable ideal, even if allowance is made for variations within that unity. Pluralism accepts the irreconcilable aspects of religions without being blind to the common aspects. Pluralism is not the eschatological expectation that at the end all must be one.
3. Pluralism does not allow for a universal system. A pluralistic system is a contradiction in terms. The incommensurability of definitive systems is unbridgeable. This incommensurability does not need to be a lesser evil, but it could be a revelation itself of the nature of reality itself.
4. Pluralism makes us aware of our contingency and the nontransparency of reality. It is incompatible with the monotheistic assumption of a totally intelligible Being, that is, with an omniscient consciousness identified with Being. Yet pluralism is not beyond intelligibility. The pluralist attitude tries to reach intelligibility, but it does not cling to the ideal of a total comprehensibility of reality.
5. Pluralism is a symbol that expresses an attitude of cosmic confidence that allows for a polar and tensile coexistence between human attitudes toward ultimate things, cosmologies, and religions. It neither eliminates nor absolutizes evil or error.

6. Pluralism does not deny the function of the *logos* and its inalienable rights. The principle of noncontradiction, for instance, cannot be denied. But pluralism belongs also to the order of the *mythos*. It incorporates *mythos*, not, of course, as an object of thought, but as a horizon that makes thinking possible.

Truth is not univocal, therefore it cannot be reduced to *one* concept. It manifests itself as the pluralism of truth.

Truth Is beyond Unity and Plurality

Pluralism affirms neither that truth is one nor that it is many. If truth were one, we could not accept the positive tolerance of a pluralistic attitude and would have to consider pluralism a connivance with error. We could, at best, refrain from any judgment regarding debatable or irrelevant matters. But how can we refrain from condemning what we judge to be evil or error? How can we postpone practical decisions, all the more when postponement itself is already an uncritical decision?

But truth is not manifold either. If truth were many, we would fall into plain contradiction. We said already that pluralism does not stand for plurality, the plurality of truth in this case. Pluralism adopts a nondualistic or Advaitic attitude that defends the pluralism of truth because reality itself is pluralistic—that is, incommensurable with either unity or plurality. Being, as such, even if accompanied by or coexistent with the *logos* or a supreme intelligence, does not need to be reduced to consciousness. In fact, the perfect self-mirroring of Being is truth, but even if the perfect image of Being is identical to Being, Being does not need to be exhausted in its image—unless we previously assume that Being is (only) Consciousness.

Truth Has No Center

In theological circles today there is a lively debate over whether Christocentrism or theocentrism or any other center should be the point of reference for Christian theology. In sociological and anthropological circles, questions of ethnocentrism, Eurocentric attitudes, and technocentrism are debated. All those discussions implicitly recognize that there has to be a center for us to reach intelligibility. The center, if there is one, is mobile. I would say to Christocentrists and theocentrists alike, "*You* are right!" But I emphasize the *you*, the context within which that particular theologian thinks. What is not necessarily true is that truth always needs to have the same center.

Let me cite the story of a wise rabbi who was leading a congregation long ago. The Jews had quarrelled and ended up in two camps, and one camp went to air its grievances to the rabbi who would say, "You are right! You are right!" On hearing this, those in the other camp also went to the rabbi and explained their position. The rabbi listened attentively and said, "You are right! You are right!" Of course the quarrel began all over again. So the intellectuals and scribes of the congregation, who knew better, formed a small commission and went to the rabbi and made their respectful statement: "Master, today you said that they are right, and yesterday that the other party was right. Obviously both cannot be right." The rabbi said, "You are right! You are right!" Now who is right? Or is the rabbi just wrong?

The relation between the three statements is of course dialectical. But the relation between the two quarrelling groups of people is not dialectical. The rabbi saw the relative completeness

of each position, although it entailed the mutual contradiction of the intellectual statements, as he also appreciated existential involvement of the third party.

What I am trying to say is that pluralism comes into play when we discover the mutual incommensurability of human positions. Pluralism is the recognition of the incompatibility of definitive creeds. We should take seriously the human experiences and struggles of the last eight thousand years of historical memory, in which every party believes it is doing the right thing. We should listen again to the wisdom of Solomon. Our numerous solutions want to cut the child in two when we cannot keep it for ourselves. Truth, like the child, is *ours*. But to keep the child alive, to keep humanity alive, to keep the polarity of the human realities alive, to keep the good faith of the people alive, to keep alive freedom as the highest dignity, we cannot judge by reason *alone*. Solomon's final judgment proved to be the correct one, because when love intervenes, when the child is *yours*, you prefer to lose, you prefer to be beaten, but the child must live.

I believe that in the present situation we all need to be able to say, "I don't understand you too well, although I think you are wrong, but your being wrong does not tell me much about my being right, or perhaps my being wrong." We need this intercourse with one another. "Interfaith" meetings are not just a dialectical affair; they also require love, dialogue, and a human touch. We live together, even if our ideas and rules are incompatible. The radius and the circumference exist together even if they are mutually incommensurable. Pluralism belongs to the human condition.

Truth Is Polar

The insight that truth itself is pluralistic may be described by saying that the very nature of truth is polar. Truth, as such, is itself a polarity. Whatever philosophical theory of truth we may espouse (correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, and the like), one thing remains common to all: truth is always a relation, be it subject-object, or subject-predicate, or knower-known, or user-used, and so forth. And there is more. One of the terms of the relation, explicitly or implicitly, is us—human beings. Even if we speak of the metaphysical truth of being or the theological truth of the Godhead itself, we as humans cannot be set aside completely. And this is especially true when dealing with religious truth. We are part of the enterprise. In other words, truth has always an element of subjectivity in the sense that we, Men, are somehow partakers in that statement, entity, process, or state of affairs that we call truth. Truth is always a relation that makes reference to us, to whom truth is truth (and not only objectively true).

Now, if the judge is only me, or only us, in a particular spatiotemporal culture, this "I" or this "we" cannot exhaust the total relation. There are two reasons for this: first, this "I" or "we" is limited and can never be sure that it has totally known the other party in question. Second, the subject (I, we) in itself cannot be objectivized, and there is no guarantee it will not change. We are one of the poles of the relationship, and we cannot be "sure" we will not change. We cannot have control over ourselves just from the objective pole, which in turn is related to the subjective one. An example for clarification is the so-called evolution of dogma. If the subjects change their perceptions and assumptions, the "objective truths" of the dogma need to change accordingly, in order to keep the relationship constant.

If the judge is not "we" but an infinite intellect, besides the fact that we can have only a limited human interpretation of this absolute intelligence, there is also no necessity whatsoever that this Intellect knows all Being. There is nothing hidden to an infinite intelligence; it is omniscient, and as such, what it knows is the Truth. One could even grant that it is the very source of truth, so that truth is precisely what this divine Intellect knows. Truth would then

originate on the part of the Subject, and not be conditioned by any object. This would favor all the more a pluralism of truth, for truth would then depend entirely on Divine Intellect and there would be an objective foundation for a persistence of the "same" truth; or rather, the "sameness" would be deprived of any point of reference to affirm itself as such. We could not say whether truth is one or many.

The traditional position would maintain that truth is one because this infinite Intellect cannot change. This kind of argument implies the identification of Being with Consciousness. But this is a gratuitous assumption not warranted by the acceptance of an infinite Consciousness. This divine Consciousness, in fact, should know all—that is, all that is knowable—but not what is all-being, unless we have previously identified Being with Consciousness. An infinite intelligence has no limits in its own field: nothing is unintelligible to it, but its field does not necessarily have to be totally identical with reality. In short, it might well be that Reality has an opaque face that Intelligibility cannot get through.

In Christian terms, the Divinity cannot be reduced to an infinite *Logos*. There is also an apophatic Source. There is also the Spirit, neither inferior to nor different from the *Logos*, but not reducible to it either. To put it paradoxically, the Truth of God, the *Logos*, is not the Whole of God, because God *is* Truth, *Logos* and infinite Truth, but He is not only this. God "is" Trinity.

We might formulate the pluralism of truth in a more *yogic* and Buddhist manner. In that case we would comment on the *cittavrttinirodha*, or cessation of all mental activity, as at the beginning of the *Yoga-sūtra*, or *ākimcanya āyatana*, the abode of nonexistence, as in primitive Buddhism. In both cases the mental is overcome and the ultimate insight goes beyond the dialectical tetralemma (A, non-A, A and non-A, neither A nor non-A). Truth is not abolished, but its abode (*āyatana*) is no longer language. As the *Suttanipāta* discreetly hints, "Are you so stupid as to really believe that your opinion is right and all the others are wrong?"

These latter considerations are just ways of speaking within particular schools. And yet almost all theologies, as Ibn 'Arabi stated so clearly with his theory of *jam'al-diddayn* (*coincidentia oppositorum*), are forced to use antinomic language and paradoxes when referring to the Divine: the truth of one statement has to be contradicted by *another* statement which is equally true. The truth cannot have a unique and univocal expression, says Ibn 'Arabi, who was traditionally considered *al-chaykh al-akbar* (the greatest master).

This would be an example of our point of view, which is directly concerned with the problem of religious truth in the encounter between religions. Let me point to some of the corollaries, without now entering into the intrinsic polarity of truth and the fact that we are, at least partially, involved in one of the poles.

The pluralism of truth entails, among other corollaries, the following:

1. The religious truth of a particular tradition can be only properly understood within the very tradition which has elaborated it. Every tradition has its own language and therefore intelligibility.
2. From one religious intellectual system one can legitimately criticize another system, provided one arrives at a certain common area where the dialogue and the critique are meaningful to both parties. We have to speak, at least to some extent, a common language.
3. At any given moment in human history there are prevalent *mythoi* that allow intercultural and transreligious criticism of held opinions. We can claim that today there is a general consensus on the negative definition of human sacrifice and slavery. But today there are also burning issues that no purely intellectual approach should

minimize. Without getting into word games, is violence to be excluded at all costs? Is God a necessary hypothesis for a just world? Is present-day capitalism a dehumanizing force? We may have our own strong opinions on these questions, but should not present them as "nonnegotiable truths."

The pluralism of truth opens our eyes, above all, to contingency; I do not possess total all-round vision, and nobody does. Second, and this is the most frightening notion, truth is pluralistic because Reality itself is pluralistic, being a nonobjectifiable entity. We as subjects are also part of it. We are not only spectators of Reality, but also coactors and even coauthors of it. *This is precisely our human dignity.*

The proliferation both of studies on peace and of pro-peace associations opens our era to hope. Dialogue among cultures, civilizations, and religions is also a positive sign of our time.

Our study places itself in this context, and the author thinks he should insist on the need to overcome the dichotomies that the Western talent for classification seems to require in order to clarify every kind of problem.

"Overcoming" does not mean canceling out differences, but rather transcending analytical thought, not with a synthesis of the results of the analysis, but with holistic thought, which I could call catholic or even contemplative. In fact, my hope is that words such as "catholic" and "contemplative" will regain their original meaning.

One global perspective certainly does not exist. Every perspective is limited, but there is always the possibility of an exchanging and even a broadening of perspectives, and the aim of intercultural dialogue is precisely this.

Giving value to the perspective of the other and trying to be aware of it, even without understanding it, is already a step on the path toward overcoming the dichotomy between knowledge and love.

The problem of peace is as complex as it is difficult. Goodwill is not enough. With goodwill, bloody wars have been waged, including so-called just wars. The practical obstacles are obvious, but there are also numerous theoretical difficulties. It is not possible properly to evaluate the point of view of the other without a knowledge of his culture; such knowledge cannot be achieved without love or at least sympathy: hence the importance of interculturality. A few want to *impose* peace, and many claim they are ready to seek it, but make an excuse of the fact that the "others" are not willing to do the same, either in practice or in theory. No one seems willing to give way (to lay down arms, to ask pardon . . .) unless the other side does so first. This vicious circle may be overcome only with the "vital circle": life is risk and courage; it does not depend on logic. This statement is dangerous, and it would be erroneous if interpreted in a dialectical sense, for it would amount to saying that life is illogical and therefore irrational. The *logos* represents the great dignity of the human being, but there is also the *spirit*, which is not subordinated to the *logos*. For this reason all cultures, from Buddhist to Christian as well as Hindu, insist on purity of heart, which leads Man to right action.

There is no doubt that understanding the other is not easy. We usually begin from our specialization (sociology, theology . . .) or from our culture (Christian, Buddhist, scientific . . .), which makes comprehension of the other difficult.

It should immediately be added that the results so far are not very encouraging. Acts against peace are not diminishing, and not always through bad will. Peace calls for more than goodwill; it also requires understanding of the other, which is not possible without transcending one's own point of view, that is, interculturality.

Man is not only an individual: he is a person, a center of relationships that extend as far as his soul can reach. In the Indic tradition a saint is a *mahātma*, a great soul; in the Abrahamic traditions a saint is one who has managed to enlarge, to expand his own soul so as to be able to love his neighbor as himself (not as an other). Chinese wisdom teaches us that the wise man is the one whose heart is all people; hermetic philosophy maintains that Man is a *mikrotheos* (miniature of God); Buddhism (*pratīyasamutpāda*), Hinduism (*karman*), Christianity (Mystical Body), and many other traditions, including Greek tradition, proclaim that everything is related to everything else. Aristotle said that the soul is in a certain way all things. Peace is this harmonious interrelation in which Man's soul plays a major role.

Although it is true that everything is related to everything else, it is just as true that each part of the Whole is different, just as all men are different. Each one is a person, a unique knot in the web of relationships that make up Reality. When this knot severs the threads connecting it with other knots, when the tension becomes so high that it no longer allows the essential freedom of interdependence between knots, and ultimately with Reality, then individualism is born. It disturbs harmony and leads to the death of the person through the loss of one's identity, which is purely relational.

Human differences, however, are not only idiosyncratic but also cultural, and they are evident in history, geography, and in countless other manifestations, which are generally defined as cultural when they crystallize themselves into different lifestyles, which also include different forms of thinking and of perceiving reality. Culture is the all-embracing myth of every cosmic vision in a given space and time.

In brief, cultural differences are not accidental; they are not a superficial aspect of the human being. This element is paramount and cannot be overlooked in the discussion about globalization. Man's nature is not only physiological, as certain branches of medicine would have it; he is also a cultural animal, and culture shapes human nature itself. Thus, cultural differences are human differences, and therefore we cannot avoid or ignore them when dealing with human problems. Just as the personality of each and everyone must be respected so that the network of human relationships does not break, so the weave must be kept as flexible as possible in order to prevent the Body of humanity from breaking. The will to establish a "unique way of thinking" or a unique civilization is a sin of wounded humanity deriving from the fact of having confused thought with abstraction. The *concept* of "Man" does not exhaust what Man is. Interculturality is indispensable to avoid falling into a monolithic vision of things that can lead to fanaticism.

Cultural differences, we repeat, are also anthropological differences. Anthropology is not only archaeology or physiology. Respect for Man requires respect for every human culture. An example that goes back half a millennium may help us better comprehend the current situation. At the height of the enthusiasm over the "discovery of the New World," when the Europeans encountered cultures that they judged as aberrant (perhaps to justify, more or less unwittingly, the exploitation of the indigenous population), they went as far as taking seriously the hypothesis that those natives were not actually human beings with souls. For analogous reasons, at the climax of Western enthusiasm over the "discovery of the New Techno-science," today's enthusiastic "believers," albeit in good faith, when meeting with other cultures that they judge to be primitive or underdeveloped, formulate the idea that such cultures do not have a soul (future life), which is why we can and must "convert" them to "ours," which, despite its imperfections, offers "us" the only practicable model.

Interculturality does not mean cultural relativism (one culture is as good as another), nor fragmentation of human nature. Every culture is a *human* culture—even though it may degenerate. To put it more philosophically, there are *human invariants*, but there are no

cultural universals. Their relationship is transcendental: the human invariant is perceived only in a particular cultural universal. All people eat and sleep, but the meaning of eating and sleeping is not the same in different cultures.

Having said that, we come back to the theme of this study. Respect for human dignity requires cultural respect, inseparable from mutual knowledge, without which we fall into the temptation of imposing our culture as a model for human coexistence. Dominant culture, characterized by an extraordinary expansionist dynamism, is not so much lacking goodwill as knowledge, and this problem cannot be resolved with the good intentions of cultural tourists or of international "merchants"—even if they are called politicians. This is the call of interculturality, which we are still far from attaining.

Unless we reduce religion to an institutionalized system of beliefs, religion and culture are inseparable even if they proceed in parallel—just as, consequently, do intercultural and religious dialogue.

Without such dialogue, harmony or peace between peoples of the world cannot exist. I began this introduction recalling the transcultural intuition of *magnanimitas*, of the *teleos-anthropos*, of the fullness of Man, of wisdom and sanctity as essential prerequisites for peace. Now I claim that this anthropological vision is also valid for human cultures, which cannot be abstracted from the people who experience and perhaps suffer them. If we separate our life from our intellect and our intellect from its own aspiration to a truth that transforms us, we must start, as in every true liturgy, with an act of radical change (*metanoia*), of repentance.

The problems of interculturality, which are by no means insignificant, must be placed at this level. The peace of humanity depends on peace among cultures. I would also add that interculturality destabilizes ideas and convictions often deeply rooted in the core of the cultures, making them appear bizarre or superficial. This is a caution to the reader, but also to the author, not to forget the fragile nature of novelty, taking it *cum grano salis*, as a renewed call to dialogue.

The author is aware of the profound syncretic character (not syncretistic, nor eclectic) of these pages, which also presume to be a text to be translated into practice. Both the problem of peace and that of interculturality are not merely moral problems, as though it were only the wicked who desired war and only the selfish who did not concern themselves with knowing other cultures. The problem is far deeper, and it could be defined as anthropological, metaphysical, or religious; yet these adjectives are still somehow too ambiguous.

Interculturality, which is a necessary if not sufficient condition for peace among peoples, the accomplishment of which is in our own hands—it is precisely this freedom that is the foundation for building our dignity and our responsibility.

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The book includes various articles revolving around pluralism in different fields—cultural, religious, philosophical—while the second part develops the concept of interculturality as closely linked to pluralism itself.

In order to keep the texts as integral as possible, certain repetitions, inevitable as the basic topics have been developed in different times and in different contexts, have been left in.

SECTION I
PLURALISM

THE MYTH OF PLURALISM

The Tower of Babel—A Meditation on Nonviolence

"Once upon a time . . .," says Genesis 11:1:

All the world spoke a single language and used the same words. As men journeyed in the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them hard"; they used bricks for stone and bitumen for mortar. "Come," they said, "let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and make a name for ourselves; or we shall be dispersed all over the earth." Then the Lord came down to see the city and tower which mortal men had built and he said, "Here they are, one people with a single language, and now they have started to do this; henceforward nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach. Come, let us go down there and confuse their speech so that they will not understand what they say to one another." So the Lord dispersed them from there all over the earth and they left off building the city. That is why it is called Babel, because the Lord there made a babble of the language of all the world; from that place the Lord scattered men all over the face of the earth.

"Once upon a time . . .," and time and again it is repeated, over and over; the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Romans, the Greeks, Alexander the Great and all the rest, the Spaniards, and the French, and the British, and the Americans, and the technocrats of modern times: they all thought themselves to be alone bearers of a flag with absolute standards. They journeyed toward the East, they journeyed toward the West to find new techniques, new ways to make stronger bricks, or better mortar, or more useful tools or powerful weapons, or whatever. It was perhaps the spear, it was the discovery of iron, it was—big jump—the atomic bomb. And then they said, "Let us spend some time together and build a big tower, one single city, one single civilization, one single construct . . . and worship one single God, because now we have got the better bricks, with which we can make something really durable, and go up to heaven and this time really build the classless society, the true justice on earth, the Proletariat mastering its own destiny," and so forth and so on. The Lord knew the futility of a dream of a monolithic system and knew that the world is pluriversal, not universal. Once upon a time . . . it was Mankind's dream (a dream which seems somehow built into the heart of Man) to build one single tower, one big ladder to heaven, one great construct. And the Lord—who seems here to be perhaps envious, or wants to keep his prerogatives, or is playing a nasty game—the Lord appears not to favor such human enterprises and, once upon a time, time and again, Nebuchadnezzar falls, the *augustus imperator* dies, the colossal empires collapse, the great hordes fade away.

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And yet we go on dreaming the same dream of a big city enclosing everything. Perhaps, after all, the Lord God knew better: that the nature of Man is not gregarious, collective, but each human being is a king, a microcosm, and the cosmos is a pluriverse and not a universe. God, as the symbol for the infinite, seems to be in his proper role when he is destroying all human endeavors toward comfortable finitudes.

In any case, after sixty centuries of human memory in the historical realm, is there no way for us to awaken to the futility of this dream? What would happen if we simply gave up wanting to build this tremendous unitarian tower? What if, instead, we were to remain in our small beautiful huts and houses and homes and domes and start building roads of communication (instead of just transportation), which could in time be converted into ways of communion between and among the different tribes, lifestyles, religions, philosophies, colors, races, and all the rest? And even if we cannot quite give up the dream of a unitarian Mankind—this dream in the monolithic system of the tower of Babel, which has become our recurring nightmare—could it not be met by just building roads of communication rather than some gigantic new empire, ways of communion instead of coercion, paths that might lead us to overstep our provincialisms without tossing us all into a single sack, into a single cult, into the monotony of a single culture?

The Problem of Pluralism

In this chapter I try to show how the problem of pluralism arises in human experience, which approaches have been tried and why I consider it to be a myth. I am not referring exclusively to so-called political pluralism, in great evidence during the first half of the last century, nor to the ideal of a "pluralistic society," as in contemporary sociological discussion. I am not going to discuss "ontological pluralism," as the phrase has it, either. My problem is related to all these concerns, and its treatment would like to offer a critical support to sociology and ontology: but it attempts to touch upon a more radical issue lying at the very basis of the use of this word "pluralism" as a living symbol whose purview includes both the nature of Man and that of the World.

Irreducibility of the Praxis to Theoria

We are here facing one of those existential problems that both arises out of a challenge from the praxis and only in the praxis find its "theoretical" solution. The present-day problem of pluralism stems from a genuine experience of disorientation and chaos, and not from any merely theoretical problematic. There is nothing very peculiar in this, since most real problems come from having to face situations that set the mind tottering. The peculiarity in such types of existential problem comes from their touching an ultimate, something irreducible in principle, and thus inviting a return to the praxis. No purely theoretical solution can ever be adequate to the problem of pluralism, and this almost by definition. A problem that has a theoretical answer is not a pluralistic problem. We should avoid the superiority complex and dominion of the intellectual as much as that of the Man of action. *Theoria* and praxis are as mutually subservient as they are consistent.

I call this an *ontonomic* relation. However this may be, the solution belongs as well to the praxis (although we can, of course, also reflect on the solution and its meaning). The relation between theory and practice is not a dialectical relation, which would only put the burden on the *logos* and thus amount to another ideology: "We know better and now we come with our own solution; all the previous towers were wrong, but we are now going to tell you the

secret for building the real, the everlasting tower. "We," the Christians, the Marxists, the Civilized, the Technocrats, the Artists, the Scientists, the Rationalists . . ."

Let me point out that there has been a shift in meaning in the word "pluralism." If we consult any dictionary we are taught that it is either a sociological concept or a philosophical notion.

In the first case we are told that pluralism deals with political theories of how to structure the interrelation between human societies, especially the state, and the other human groupings. In the second case we find that pluralism is distinguished from monism and dualism, and that pluralism can be atomic, absolute, substantial, and so on, depending on whether you refer to Bertrand Russell and his logical atomism, or to William James, or to Gilbert Ryle, or whoever. In short, pluralism has classically been considered a metaphysical concept that raises certain questions about reality—in the abstract, so to speak. Today the meaning of the word is shifting from a sociological and metaphysical to an existential locus, which helps us to discover its roots. Pluralism is today a human, existential problem that raises acute questions about how we are going to live our lives in the midst of so many options. Pluralism is no longer just the old schoolbook question about the One and the Many: it has become a concrete day-to-day dilemma occasioned by the encounter of mutually incompatible worldviews and philosophies. Today we face pluralism as the very practical question of planetary human coexistence.

Now, of course, the great temptation is, and has always been, to create a super-system: "Here I am, the tolerant one, who has made a place for everybody and for all the different systems. Obviously you will have to stay in the place I have allotted you, I—the great *jivanmukta* of the Vedantic persuasion—I know that I am above all the differences, and I have a place for Buddhists, for Jews, for Muslims, for everyone . . . provided, of course, that they behave and sit at the places I have assigned them, and I have a superior vision that allows me to be totally tolerant and to keep all the other people in the world within it."

This is certainly not an attitude of pluralism.

The question of pluralism is also linked to the quandary presented by a *plurality* of irreducible entities. To be tolerant of a plurality of religions or world markets or schools of art as long as we can go along with our own idiosyncrasies, doing business as usual, being only respectful of the otherwise noninterfering whims of the others, has little to do with religious, economic, or artistic pluralism. The plurality of absolutely sovereign nations that promise not to meddle in their neighbors' affairs, because they implicitly recognize that there are at the most international, but not supernational, problems like human rights, universal social issues, or planetary concerns, has again little to do with pluralism. Pluralism begins when the *praxis* compels us to take a stance in the effective presence of the other, when the *praxis* makes it impossible to avoid mutual interference, and the conflict cannot be solved by the victory of one part or party. Pluralism emerges when the conflict looms unavoidable.

The problem of pluralism arises only when we feel—we suffer—the incompatibility of differing worldviews and are at the same time forced by the *praxis* of our factual coexistence to seek survival. The problem becomes acute today because contemporary *praxis* throws us into the arms of one another; we can no longer live cut off from one another in geographical boxes, cloistered in neat little compartments and departments, segregated into economical capsules, cultural areas, racial ghettos, and so forth. Perhaps the greatest, albeit indirect, achievement of technology is to have brought people and peoples together. Today isolation is no longer possible, and the problem of pluralism has become the first order of business. Neither Chinese walls, oceans, secret police, nor armies can protect us against mass media and atomic bombs.

Importance of the Problem

The problem of pluralism is in a certain sense the problem of *the other*.

How can we tolerate, or even understand, the other when this is in no way—rationally, reasonably, or intelligibly—feasible? The world is perhaps no longer in the arms of Greek *moira* or the Indian *karma*, or in the hands of the Abrahamic providence. The world nowadays appears to be in *our* hands, and it seems to be in rather worse shape than in those days when we could at least curse the fates, charge destiny, or dispute like Job with his God as to whether or not he had acted justly. We no longer have anyone to blame for our woes but ourselves. What in Man has become more unfathomable and distant to human beings than any traditional Deity? *How can we deal with incompatible systems?* How can we deal with the ultimate problems of Man? How can we deal in justice with the problem of the other? It is worth noting that practically every so-called civilization has reached its ascendancy at the expense of some "marginal" people that has not reached the same level: the goyim, the kaffir, the infidel, the pagan, the poor, the illiterate, the savage, the black, the Third World . . . in a word: the barbarian.

And here I cannot but feel the tremendous power of words. The name *barbara* is a Sanskrit word, from an Indo-European root, and from there it went to the *barbaros* of the Greeks and then the Latins, and then the Barbarians. Ibn Khaldūn refers to Qays ben Sayfi, a legendary king of South Arabia and contemporary of Moses, who gave the Berbers that name after hearing their "barbarah." *Barbara* is an onomatopoeic name; it means a kind of *blathering*; it means stammering . . . because you are a foreigner, a non-Aryan, a colored, have curly hair (which is the secondary meaning of the word) and speak in a way that I cannot understand. Perhaps now we begin to discover that the problem of the barbarians can no longer be solved at their expense, or provisionally solved in the expectation that "one day they will become *cives romani*, civilized, Christians, one day we will make of them "developed countries," one day the slaves will be freed and be allowed all the gadgets of freedom and democracy, one day all the illegal immigrants and coolies will come and live with this in this great tower of Babel but we are meanwhile forcing them to build for us . . ." Ironically, in the Christian history there is a Saint Barbara, nearly a symbol that the barbarian should not just be tolerated or assimilated but rather blessed, canonized, sanctified. This is the challenge of the current kairological moment.

The barbarian is the other, not my representation of him or her. The problem of the other qua other: How can we pretend to deal with the ultimate problems of Man if we insist on reducing the human being to only the American, or to only the Christian, or to the black or the male, or the exclusively heterosexual, or the healthy and "normal" or the so-called civilized? Obviously we cannot. What I shall say is that the true foundation of a pluralistic society is not pragmatism, is not common sense, is not tolerance, is not just the lesser evil, but rather that pluralism is rooted in the deepest nature of things.

An important objection should be met here. In saying that the justification for pluralism is not on the level of pragmatism—out of sheer necessity to put up with the other—but is grounded in the nature of Man and Reality, am I not securing a theoretical basis for pluralism and thus contradicting my initial statement that the pluralistic problem set by praxis cannot be solved by any theory?

Two observations may dispel this objection. The first is to recall that I began telling the myth of pluralism not by dispelling the myth, but by clarifying that pluralism is indeed a myth in the most rigorous sense: an ever-elusive horizon in which we situate things in order to be conscious of them without ever converting the horizon into an object. The myth is irreduc-

ible to the *logos*—despite their common origin and thus not reducible to theory either. The second observation will simply remind us that nowhere is it said that the nature of Man and Reality are totally transparent to theory or, in other words, that Man is synonymous with anthropology or Reality with philosophy—even as objects of consciousness. Affirming then that the nature of Man and/or Reality is pluralistic, I am contending that no anthropology (or anthropologies), no philosophy (or philosophies), has ever exhausted—not even theoretically—Man and Reality. Neither can theory offer the last justification for the praxis (on what is theory itself based?), nor can praxis offer the ultimate foundation for theory (on what is praxis itself justified?).

The ultimate metaphysical assumption of the greatest part of Western civilization, since the pre-Socratics, is the conviction of the intimate correspondence between thinking and being. They may be ultimately the same or different, but they “theoretically” match each other. And my contention is that this genial intuition is not humanly universal and thus not universalizable if we want to encompass the whole range of the human experience—or of the human fact. The Buddhist world, for instance, does not make such an assumption.

Genesis of the Problem

Pluralism Is Meaningless (Uniformity)

Except at the exceptional, and generally mythical, beginnings, the community (family, tribe, nation, group, church . . .) precedes the individual. The individual enters or is born into a society he has not shaped. Here rites of initiation (name-giving circumcision, baptism, contract, vows . . .) have their place. Before this everything is indiscriminately undifferentiated: “all young men are uncles”; “all Chinese look alike.” There is an *undifferentiated consciousness*: all the others are thrown into a single sack, all the others are “Third World.” (What indeed do the people of the so-called Third World have in common, except a certain type of GNP?) The other qua other does not exist; and if he exists at all, he is non-persona, unreckoned with, ignored. We live in an undifferentiated world, however big or small this world may be. The tribe is the world.

Pluralism Amounts to Plurality (Difference)

At a certain moment, the individual begins to notice that his group is not the only such group existing in the world (there are other families, tribes, nations, churches, religions). He becomes conscious of *multiplicity*. This could be called the de facto recognition of plurality. In pluralit the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of multiplicity does not arise. It is a fact. It does not create unbearable frictions because the boundaries are clearly drawn and zealously guarded.

One nation is just another nation, one group simply another group, one individual merely another individual, and the like. Multiplicity is taken for granted, and there is no question about unity. (Bertrand Russell, defending the “absolute pluralism” he at first called “logical atomism,” could serve as an example here.)

Pluralism Means Pluriformity (Variety)

At another moment the individual becomes aware that he has a particular vision of his own group. He realizes that his interpretation, although obviously the best for him, is not the only possible one. Other people in the same group hold different opinions, and these

notions crystallize in different forms (political parties, religious persuasions, various sectors, roles, and functions) within the one given community. Man becomes aware of variety. This could be called the awareness of pluriformity. It is the reign of Quality; the different peoples with different skills begin to construct Babel. In pluriformity the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of variety does not arise, because the unity of the group is already an accepted fact. There is the nation, and within it a variety of political parties. There is the church, and within it a variety of activities. Unity is taken for granted, and variety is not seen as a challenge to it. Here we all live within a single myth. But this can become the erroneous assumption of philosophies and worldviews when they try to be universal, extrapolating from any one such unified horizon. (Postmedieval Christianity could be a typical example: they want to be universal from a perspective that is seen as universal only from within the system.)

Pluralism Connotes Unattainable Harmony (Diversity)

There is another moment in the evolution of individuals and societies when Man becomes conscious of diversities which, if pushed to the limit, would break the unity. Man becomes aware of *both* the need for diversity and the need for unity. But harmony between the two needs has suddenly become problematic; they seem to be incompatible. "Deutschland über alles" and the United States as the greatest nation in the world ultimately cannot coexist. Christianity as the "absolute religion" and Hinduism as the "everlasting dharma" are incomparable. A philosophy based on the real difference between essence and existence, as the very foundation for human freedom and for distinction between creator and creature, cannot be reconciled with a Scotistic position; a Thomist can neither agree with a Scotist nor really understand how the latter can avoid pantheism and call himself a Christian—and, obviously, vice versa. Or again, St. Paul did not think it was possible for married people to be so undivided as to be fully consecrated to God. In other words, as long as Germany and the United States are independent nations, Christianity and Hinduism unrelated religions, Thomism and Scotism autonomous philosophies, as long as worldly matters are kept apart from those of God, there is no problem. The problem appears when interaction becomes inevitable and we discover we have only one world for both Germany and the United States, only one truth for Hinduism and Christianity, only one church for Thomism and Scotism, only one perfection for the married and celibate alike. They not only have to communicate about the means (tools) but share the goals (the one Tower). Isolation is no longer possible, and unity is not convincing since it destroys one of the parties.

At this moment, the alternatives seem to be either despair with all that it entails or hope with all that it demands. This second half of our century can be called both the age of despair and the age of hope. Time is running short: either it will have to begin all over again (liturgy and death) or it will blow up (eschatology and revolution). "*Los extremos se tocan.*"

Approaches to Pluralism

At this point I shall have to try to say just what pluralism is. I would approach the formulation by means of three different avenues: the *philosophical*, the *phenomenological*, and the *anthropological*.

The Philosophical Approach

From a philosophical viewpoint, the conflict between the One and the Many, which has occupied Man at least since Plato in the West and the Upanishads in the East, is perhaps the

central question of the human mind. I shall confine myself to focusing on metahistorical sketches, which will attempt to indicate some ways Man has dealt with the problems of ultimate human diversities. The problem of the *hen hai polla, ekam evādvitīyam*, or, as we may put it here, (a) monism, (b) dualism, (c) a-dualism, could be formulated as follows: (a) one or many, and the one at the end succeeds; (b) one and many, and the many wins; and (c) neither one nor two, and the tensile polarity is maintained. Because of brevity, some caricatures are inevitable, but you will understand, I am sure, with *esprit de finesse*. Please notice: this tripartite division is transcultural and should be interpreted bearing in mind the problem of pluralism. So, we neither maintain that the West is dualistic nor that the East is a-dualistic, and that many philosophers are monists; moreover, these three concepts are much richer in meaning than described here.

Monism

Reality is one; Being is univocal; plurality is secondary, provisional, or even apparent. But this plurality manifests itself and must therefore be reassessed. The first way is governed by the law of the jungle: what the West might call the law of history, science the law of nature, and philosophy the law of power. The monism here may be latent or implicit; it need not show its true colors immediately. The stronger in claws, intelligence, or weapons shall win. This is the so-called law of nature. The secret of culture is to *postpone* the confrontation long enough for it to be "solved" eventually, by the victory of the most powerful. We have to tolerate the other until we can conquer, convert, convince, or indoctrinate him. Patience, also called prudence and tolerance, are the key words here, along with strategy, apostolate, conversion, victory, and the like. One Empire, one Church, one God, one Civilization, one Party, one Technology, etc. are so many general expressions of this first attitude. Monism is its final expression. Monotheism, as distinct from theism, could be another key word. Colonialism and imperialism would be the polemical descriptions. And eschatology may be the most refined way of taming the conflict by postponing the solution until the end. With a linear conception of time, this is perfect for the stronger; he can wait in the hope of final victory. If time is circular, each moment is independent of its final outcome, and one does not need to believe in eschatology. One does not need to assume that the real beauty of a symphony lies only in its finale. No wonder that monistic exploitation has found it easier to dominate peoples indifferent to the one-way flow of history. Theological eschatology puts in a vertical transcendence what historical eschatology puts in a horizontal future.

In a monistic worldview, there is no legitimate place for pluralism. It is at most *tolerated*—with kindness and patience (or sometimes without them)—to avoid a greater evil. Plurality is always provisional.

In the end the One must be attained. It is the optimism of the future. I am not saying that monism offers a bad solution. Well understood, it may well be that it maintains the polarity of helping us to strive for an ultimate unity and to put up with pluralities for the time being, during the itinerant condition of Man and Being. Man has then a goal, and at the same time an awareness of his fallen or provisory condition, so that patience becomes the central virtue—by which we possess our lives, to quote the Gospel. The eschatology of the Omega Point is, at the end of the day, monism.

Dualism

Reality is dual, Being is univocal, plurality can only be overcome by transforming it. The second way to deal with the problem of ultimate diversities is the genuine dialectical

method. Here, in a sense, pluralism is tamed. The tension between the One and the Many is solved by the so-called rules of the mind seeking a balance, and eventually a synthesis, between the *sic et non*. The differing opinions, worldviews, and attitudes are permitted a "free" dialectical interaction; Man allows this free interplay of the various factors in full confidence that the conflict will be channeled and eventually resolved. Coexistence is the ground rule that enables the dialectical exchange to take place on all levels. Theoretically any opinion could be represented, provided it is willing to descend into the dialectical arena and struggle there on its own behalf. If it is defeated, it will lose the right to exist. Democracy and freedom are key words here; numbers (votes, points, dollars . . .) are considered decisive, the result of a dialectical process by which these very numbers are gained. It is not quite so simple as "one man, one vote," because the more responsibilities, the more votes you win and the cleverer you are, the more money you earn, so that power and influence are justly distributed according to talents. Liberalism, free enterprise, interplay, propaganda, and so forth are other expressions of the same attitude. Dualism is its final expression. But true dualism implies that both parties accept the dialectical game. It works only so long as the one and the many are more or less equally powerful. Dualism works when you have Tory and Labour, the United States and the U.S.S.R., but why should the white South Africans accept a Round Table Conference or the US government allow the Symbionese Liberation Army to exist if they are convinced that the aim of the other is to destroy the opponent totally? Monism is lurking here. We allow coexistence as long as the other does not question our existence. Some compromise in good faith because they would not wipe you out even if they could (the democratic opposition, for instance, belongs to the system). Others compromise in bad faith because they realize that they cannot eliminate you. What then is to be done—*Écraser l'infâme*? Invade South Africa or the Soviet Union? Or should they attack first, knowing their adversary's intentions?

Again I am not saying that dualism is a bad or a wrong option. Perhaps in some instances it is the only "realistic" one. Perhaps the factual human situation does not allow for any other form of survival; perhaps it trusts the spontaneous intuition of Man, the divine animal, endowed certainly with what the Greeks called *zōē* (spiritual, infinite life), but also with what they called *Bios* (animal, finite, or we may even say, vital life). In any case, the problem of pluralism is not solved by accusing others as the villains and presenting ourselves as the heroes.

A-Dualism

Reality is neither one nor manifold, it is not quantifiable nor completely intelligible. Polarity is constitutive and should not be eliminated but acknowledged; there is neither a final victory on the one hand nor a dialectical *Aufhebung* on the other. There is still a third way, of which our epoch is becoming increasingly aware, although it has existed along with the others since the very beginning. The first way tries to solve ultimate conflict by promoting the triumph of truth, God, law and order, and so on, and, indeed, it succeeds in curbing the disruptive forces of a given status quo. The temptation is the one of power, that is, to think that God is always on the side of the strongest battalion. The second way tries to solve the incompatibility by a provisional and dynamic balance between the different positions, and it certainly works as long as we believe in the same myth. The third way is sensitive to both the right of power and the wisdom of tension, but attempts a radically different approach from a monolithic solution in favor of the most powerful and a dualistic solution that is bound either to stiffen into an unstable and explosive balance or fall into a compromise in

which the minority is given only a consolation prize. *A-dualism* would be its expression. Here pluralism appears as an awareness leading to a positive acceptance of diversity—an acceptance that neither forces the different attitudes into an artificial unity, nor alienates them by reductionistic manipulations. Here power does not have the last word, nor is majority rule the decisive factor.

As we saw, the problem of pluralism arises when we cannot dismiss the other from a unity that somehow encompasses both of us even though we are unable to agree with (or often even understand) the other party. We can neither dispense with nor break unity—it is above us. We cannot leave the country or the language or the planet, for instance—nor approve of or understand diversity—again obliged by a power superior to our will. “We” cannot condone torture or capitalism or dictatorship. As the poet once said speaking of love: *nec tecum nec sine te*, neither with you nor without you can I live.

Seen from another angle, the problem of pluralism arises when we face an insoluble conflict of ultimate values: on the one hand we cannot renounce the claims of our personal conscience, and on the other we cannot renounce the claim of our personal consciousness. For Abraham the problem of sacrificing his own son was not a pluralistic problem because God was the absolute master of both his conscience and his consciousness. Here there is no ultimate conflict. For Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, however, the problem was one of pluralism. Arjuna was torn between his conscience, which told him to follow the sacred duty of his caste, and his consciousness, which told him that waging war would not solve anything. The problem of pluralism is the borderline problem, the ultimate instance: God or Man, Conscience or Consciousness, Family or Country, Church or World, Fidelity to myself or loyalty to my society. The problem arises when I feel that I have inalienable rights whose preservation has become an ultimate duty for me. Pluralism arises in the area of that which is nonnegotiable for us. All the rest is a matter of acceptance, or compromise, or prudence, or *savoir faire*; but pluralism itself is nonmanipulable. Pluralism begins its course in the world when Man, having lost his innocence, tries desperately to gain a new innocence. If philosophy and religion ignore this problem, we can well understand why they have little credibility when they try to give us a compass for orientation in our world. Authentic human life is facing death constantly: “To be or not to be,” as young Naciketas exclaims in the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*.

I should end the short description of this third attitude by repeating what was emphasized in the other two cases, namely, that this fundamental option may be both a valid one, allowing us to overcome tensions without destruction of positive values, and a stifling attitude enervating us in the face of conflictive situations.

I should include a sort of footnote: Man has often tried to resolve the dilemma by introducing a moral factor and absolutizing goodness when he could not succeed with truth. “The other is bad because he wants to kill me.” “We are convinced that the Turks are a danger for Christendom, and so we organize a crusade; we are convinced that the Asian communists are a danger for the free world, and so we wage a war.” Or we exploit the earth because we want more paper or oil, and so on. As long as we are on the top, “we”—Christians, whites, males, Hindūs in India, Muslims in Pakistan, Westerners, rich people, the Educated, the Technocrats, the Trade-Unionists, the humans (against the earth)—as long as “we” are on top, we find ways of soothing, of making things palatable, of arranging things so that the other is somewhat happy in his subordinate position. But when the other begins to kick back, we are obliged to come to terms . . . and then what happens? Only a truce, until we have better weapons?

Or?

The Phenomenological Approach

The problem of pluralism reaches the critical phase when we simply do not know what we have to say or to do. A phenomenological approach might say that pluralism appears as a problem when every other means for dealing with diversity fails. I have chosen three sorts of failure, which I shall briefly present to you. I am not defending a pessimistic vision of human nature as if there were a Platonic paradigm of what Man is supposed to be; but I am not indulging in an optimistic evaluation either, as if we should only look toward a rosy future, afraid to look into the errors of the past. A realistic attitude should not be discouraged by the failures of the past but cannot ignore them either.

Any writer is already a privileged being, any listener and reader of a reflection on the human condition already stands out from the average of his fellow humans. The underdogs don't give lectures, nor listen to them, nor have they much time for reflection. Even when they are not directly persecuted and tortured or starving, they live under the ever-present danger of losing a precarious balance whose absence might leave them at the mercy of human insensitivity. When we say Man, we forget the slaves, for generations without number, those exploited by foreign and domestic lords, the serfs, the armies of soldiers, workers in the service of causes they don't even understand, the multitudes of displaced, deprived, and hungry specimens of our human race. Who can be spokesman for them if they cannot even begin to articulate what they want or need? The subdued majority has not even a voice, and if we were to give them one in order to let them speak in our terms, we would easily convince them that they are pitiable, ignorant, and degraded fellows who deserve their lot. No wonder that their leaders are not prophets (who speak) or priests (who perform) but heroes who kill, retaliate, howl, and destroy. It is against this background that we should reflect on the meaning of pluralism. All the rest is "edifying" literature.

The Historical-Political Failure

A pluralistic problem arises when the question cannot be solved by democratic means because we cannot abide by the rule of the majority in regard to those values most vital to us. It would amount to suicide, and even suicide may not be an option. You vote only on means, never on ultimate ends. Can you tolerate the intolerant? But if you don't, then you become as intolerant as he. Is balance of power the only solution?

No need for us to linger over the political failure of all civilizations. History shouldn't be, but in fact is, a collection of successive and often simultaneous wars, which each time seem more or less justified to the parties concerned while even the victors often wonder a posteriori if the prize was worthwhile or even if the victory was really such. The law of the jungle and dialectics, monism and dualism, cannot boast of a great record. Shouldn't we be concerned at this turning point of humanity? The question of pluralism may be like looking for a white lotus in a dirty pond or a lily emerging from a dung heap. But out of the ruins of both victor and vanquished, pluralism may thrust itself up like a flower—alas, even more fragile than the lotus and the lily.

Millennia of repression, dominion, and power policy (and not only political)—all those systems based on either monistic or dualistic bases have only triggered off more injustice, exploitation, and hunger. On a world scale the system has not worked. It might have worked for you and me but the Ukrainian, the Jew, the Dalit, the Quechua, the Black, the Woman, to name just a few, have not been included. And in fact the positive changes—and here are many—came thanks to Socrates, Buddha, Jesus, Gandhi . . . and not Alexander, Akbar, Napoleon, Churchill (not to name villains).

The problem of keeping peace is not a new problem. The syndrome of being menaced and in danger of being attacked and annihilated is almost a constant factor in the history of peoples. Violence meets violence, and arms are opposed with arms. "Defense" is justified by fear of a possible "offense." What the Russians are today for the "first world," what the Vietnamese for the Cambodians, or the Chinese for the Vietnamese, the Americans for the Russians, and so on, the Moors, Saracens, and Turks were—for almost three centuries—for the West. Europe since the twelfth century lived in perpetual fear of Islam. The response was the Crusades. But after the first experiences, Crusades were no longer possible. To the pathetic calls of some popes and princes, most of the nobility and the people did not respond. In 1453 Constantinople falls. Europe lives in paroxysm. A respite is given when in 1492 Grenada is conquered by Fernando el Catolico. But there is no Council, no major political event without the reminder of the imminent danger to "Christendom." It is not until 1571 that Juan de Austria wins the victory of Lepanto, which became a universal feast for the entire Church, understandably enough. But the danger is not even conjured away after Lepanto, just as all Shivaji's victories over the Moslems have not resolved the problem in India.

Yet—and this is my point—a handful of people take another turn. Aśoka, Ramon Llull, Nicholas of Cusa, Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, Jean Luis Vives, and many others do not believe in violence and war and propose a true ecumenism: dialogue, persuasion, understanding. They are not popular, they are considered idealists and often have to suffer, but they offer an alternative. Perhaps we should begin to realize that it is less risky to venture a peaceful attitude than to trust in a deterrent and menacing counter-power.

The Philosophical-Dialectical Failure

A pluralistic problem arises when the issue cannot be dealt with dialectically because it calls into question the very foundation of dialectics. In fact, Man is so made that in many fields of human existence, even if dialectically "cornered"—convicted of contradiction, lack of intellectual proof, or logical impasse—he will not cease believing, hoping, or loving that which he holds to be the case. Many people do not stop believing or disbelieving in God or in the reality of the world even if the issue is proven or disproven by accepted dialectical means and every possible intellectual reasoning. To say that astrology is irrational, for instance, leaves astrology unconcerned and astrology lovers happy. There are, in other words, sources of human convictions, beliefs, hopes, and loves that defy the power of reason and are apparently stronger than and superior to it. And this is a fact: I may be convinced, and yet that conviction may not carry strength or effectiveness.

The instances of European thought from Descartes onward or of Buddhist philosophy after Nāgārjuna exemplify this failure. The rationale behind these efforts is clear: "Given the scandal produced by the divergent opinions of the best people regarding the most important questions of life and death, let us establish an infallible system based on reason alone or on the dialectical effort to transcend dialectics." And after centuries of philosophizing, what we have is a new proliferation of mutually exclusive systems of thought, whatever names they apply to themselves and qualifications they seem to make. The Tower of Babel has not been constructed, and no *philosophia perennis* has reached the second floor. Neither reason nor even a "broadminded" philosophy has succeeded in constructing a worldview, a Tower of Babel, where people might live, at least theoretically, in justice and peace.

The Religio-Cultural Failure

A pluralistic problem arises when the conflict cannot be resolved by violence or power because we cannot bring ourselves to yield to pressure, even if threatened unto death. The Roman Empire had to yield to Christians, the Soviet Union has had to recognize the presence of dissidents, and the histories of the Kurds, Armenians, Jains, and so many others offer equally valid examples. There is something in Man that neither power, nor violence, nor domination can succeed in controlling or reducing to unity. The history of any religion is more the adventure of its heresies than the evolution of its orthodoxy.

We must not drown ourselves in euphemisms: the ancient empires wanted to conquer the whole world; Christianity and Islam—to cite two striking but hardly exclusive examples—aspired to become not only the number-one religion, but ideally the one religion; scientific civilization and humanistic culture have similar claims today. What we so clearly discern as utopian if not ridiculous in the *urbi et orbe* of the ancient Romans and the Catholic Romans we seem not to detect in our own dreams of universality. Although many agree that Man cannot build Babel, they go on believing that they at least have the plans: "If everyone were a good Christian! If everyone practiced Transcendental Meditation every day! If everyone followed the dictates of Science! . . . If everyone thought and behaved like me!"

And that is why, after at least sixty centuries of human civilization, we still have to ask ourselves this fundamental question: What is there in Man that makes him irreducible to unity and yet unable to renounce the quest for it? After the fiasco of the Tower of Babel, can we not foresee some possibility for the world other than of a paneconomic system and a single technological megamachine?

The Anthropological Approach

Three Anthropological Chapters

In facing such concrete and existential problems modern Man is again asking the question about himself which perhaps begins to close the wider circle opened by the first Western Man, Augustine (an African): *Quaestio mihi factus sum*, "I have made a question of myself." (I have become a problem for myself.) "What *am* I for myself?" has become "What is Man for me?"—that is, as known by me that I might know him better, and eventually have *it* in my hand? I am suggesting that we may be taking a third step in Man's self-reflection upon himself in the overall context of the world civilizations.

What is Man? This is the Western way of formulating the anthropological question. Man is an object of research—even of introspection—and the science of Man would be an integration of all the results of the specific disciplines dealing with one or another aspect of the human being. We call it integral anthropology, and today even theologians pay tribute to it when they speak of theological anthropology. What is that being which we call Man that can think, speak, build . . . ?

Who am I? would be the typical Indian way of formulating the same question. Man is here the scrutinizing subject trying to eat the cake even if he cannot have it. Man tries to assist at the very origins of his *I-consciousness* and pushes it deeper and deeper until the I has been peeled off from every layer of contingency. We call it wisdom, and its aim is to reconstruct the entire body of knowledge from that supracosmic intuition.

I would not wish to oversimplify these two extraordinary and fecund approaches, which still remain the two basic pillars for human self-understanding. But in our time of encounter

and the mutual fecundation of cultures, a third equally fundamental way remains to be explored with the same thoroughness as the other two.

Who are you? is the third question. I shall try to explain what this means because, since the Indo-European languages have lost the dual, the sentence is ambiguous. Nor "What is Man?" (objectification, even if we call it a subject); nor "What am I?" (subjectification, even if we find it in the *ātman*); but "What are you?" And this is a radically different question, for it not only cannot be answered without *you*, but it requires you as a fellow questioner (*Mitfragender*)—and the "you" is the Pygmy, and the Muslim, and the woman, and the communist, and the Christian, and the Democrat, and the wife, and the worker, and the poor. If I want to know what Man is in a more comprehensive way, I must listen to myself and I must also ask *you*. The question "What am I?" the question "What is it (he or she)?" is simply not enough. I have to ask "What are you?" look you in the eye, and formulate it better: "*Who are you?*" Who can say what Man *is* if none of us has access to the total range of human experience? The question about Man belongs to Man and not exclusively to me, even if I make an effort to speak on behalf of a large human group. Either we take pluralism seriously, or it becomes just another label for our philosophical imperialism. And if we take it seriously, we cannot bypass the *you of any human being*.

What I am getting at here is simple and straightforward: Man is not an object of research . . . alone or mainly; he himself is a searching subject. But this searching subject is not only my ego, it is also you. In more simplified terms: Man's self-understanding belongs to Man's being. Even more plainly: self-understanding is part of any understanding. But the self is not my ego alone or "we" alone. No encounter of cultures or religions can really take place without a new anthropology, a cross-cultural religious anthropology.

We now come to a sort of anticlimax, for obviously I cannot in this context describe the whole process of becoming aware of the I, the thou, the he/she/it, the we, the you, and the they—which would be the proper way to lay the groundwork for an anthropology capable of at least discerning the problem. With the Hellenic categories, on the one hand, which have shaped most of the objective anthropological vision, and with the Upanishadic ones, which have been at the basis of most of the subjective experience of Man, we should now forge a third type of basic symbol for the integration of the three perspectives under which Man sees himself: as an I, a thou, and an it. Instead I shall simply sketch some insights that might serve as stepping-stones toward this cross-cultural religious anthropology, using the common Western categories as starting points without further elaboration.

Overcoming a Threefold Reductionism

In order to make my point, I shall speak of a threefold reductionism that seems to plague the modern conception of the human being.

Reason is not the whole logos. Here I refer to the famous *animal rational*, which, as I have already mentioned, is a rather constricted translation of Aristotle's definition of Man as *zōon logon echon*, that is, as a living being—or an animal—through which or through whom the *logos* transits: "Among the animals Man is the only one endowed with *logos*." Reasoning reason is only one aspect, almost a technique, of the *logos*. The *logos* is a certain intelligibility (the *logos* is the *energeia* of the *nous*, following Plato's definition), but it is not primarily reason. Rather it is word, *verbum* (verb); but *verbum entis* much more than just *verbum mentis*: it is the revelation, the very symbol of Being—the *logos* is, along with the *epos*, the *mythos*, and the *ainos*, one of the four ingredients of consciousness. I repeat: Reason belongs to *logos*, but it is not identical with it. *Logos* is also sound, it is content and intent, it is spiritual and material.

And saying this I am in fellowship with Israel's *dabar*, India's *vāc*, and the Christian *logos*, but here I am only sketching the problematic, and limit myself to affirming that reason does not exhaust the *logos* and thus that the terms *irrational* and *arational* are not synonymous with *illogical* and *alogical*.

We could put this in a more existential way, using another perspective, and simply say that *the individual is not the whole of Man*.

Logos is not the whole of Man. This is the second reductionism. There is also myth, there is body, there are feelings, there is world . . . but here I should prevent a possible misunderstanding: the moment I say that the *logos* is not the whole Man, I am saying it *with the logos*; it is the *logos* that allows me to say this. What this means is that all *the efforts to transcend the logos have the logos as a fellow traveler*. Just as reason permeates the whole of the *logos* without being the whole of it, so the *logos* permeates the whole of Man without being the whole of him. The constituent elements of the human reality are not like parts of a macro-physical body (*Körper*, not *Leib*). The relation is not a spatial one—as if here we have one little thing and there another thing, and so we are made of all these things stuck together—but there *is* a mutual interaction and interpenetration so that there is nothing that I can separate from the *logos*, and yet the *logos* itself can make me aware that not everything is *logos*. We cannot recover the innocence we had to lose to become who we are, but we may perhaps acquire—or conquer or perhaps simply accept or receive—a new innocence. And precisely here cross-cultural studies are indispensable; they show us other forms of intelligibility, other perspectives of understanding, other forms of awareness . . . forms that cannot be reduced to one common denominator.

Of course, the way to attain this pure consciousness is not by looking for an object nor even by looking for consciousness, but rather by becoming *self-transparent* as subject. Here you cannot become a sage unless you become a saint. The quest for pure consciousness is not the quest for knowledge; it is of another type altogether. It could perhaps be called mystical awareness, but here I can only point out stepping-stones toward a new anthropology. The necessary ambiguity of the word "pure" I applied to consciousness has often led to the belief that "pure consciousness" is a consciousness so pure that only a few shamans, mystics, and ecstasies can reach it, forgetting that pure—unmixed and mere consciousness—is the very basis for having consciousness of something. And undoubtedly, "pure consciousness" is not "consciousness of pure consciousness," as the *Tao-te Ching*, the Kenopanishad, the Gītā, and the Gospels again and again repeat to us.

Another way to say this would be to affirm that *Man is not the whole of Humanity*.

Man is not the whole of Being. It should be clear, of course, that nothing is unrelated to Man, that all that there is, is there with Man. . . . Neither the Divine nor the Material is separable from Man. Quoting from the Confucian *Chung Yung*, Man is the heart—the heart and mind—of the entire reality: the third between Heaven and Earth.

Consciousness may be all-pervading, and there is surely no way for us to deny that consciousness and being are coextensive. There is nothing beyond consciousness because the beyond already belongs to consciousness. And to interpret this statement as saying that *there is* Nothingness beyond consciousness is a plain contradiction. And yet consciousness itself witnesses to Man that he is not alone in the universe, nor even the center of it but just one pole.

The other way to put this would be to say that *Humanity is not the whole of Reality*.

All this has not been a digression but an overcondensed presentation of the foundations of pluralism. Short of these and similar considerations, pluralism would be reduced to one, *our*

more comprehensive and tolerant vision of the world. Many uses of the word imply a sort of "pluralistic society" in which you are allowed to appear odd in the eyes of the other because nobody cares, nobody interferes, and we are all happy in our little boxes. This may be many things but not pluralism. The problem of pluralism is neither just a practical problem (a kind of stopgap because we do not know how to behave with the other), nor merely or simply a human problem (because we are limited beings and thus have to put up with imperfection). The problem of pluralism arises because the very nature of reality is pluralistic. The underlying myths for the doctrines of the Trinity and nondualism and many other myths might stand for this insight. Or, to go back to our original Jewish parable at Babel, the Lord confused Man's dream of a monolithic and totalitarian vision of reality.

Pluralistic Man

I am saying that Man himself is a pluralistic being, that he is not reducible to an unqualified unity, nor can anything human be said to have a oneness we can grasp. To say human nature is one, or to say Truth is one, or even to say God is one, is philosophically ambiguous. Either the statement refers to a nonnumerical transcendental one, and then we have simply the principle of identity, or it is a categorical, and hence purely formal statement—or, if filled with my particular contents, it is wrong outright; it is either a tautology or an empty statement with no proper contents. If we fill it with any meaning, we will have to ask: One what? To say there is no other Man, or no other Truth, or no other God, staying with our threefold example: What do we mean by it? If other Man, other Truth, other God means that there is no other Man than Man and so on, then we have the necessary tautology of the principle of identity: Man is Man, Truth Truth, God God. But if we mean by this that there is no *other* Man, Truth, or God than what we take Man, Truth, or God to be—that is, other than what tallies with our conception of it—then those entities are made dependent on our concepts: There is no other Man, Truth, or God than what we consider Man, Truth, and God to be. We establish a closed system and ask the others to become members of our club if they want discussion with us! We may bring the symphony of the different civilizations of humankind into a tube of harmony not by lopping off all the differences and imposing some *a priori* schema of intelligibility, perfect as this may be, but rather by allowing all of these different civilizations to say their word, or dance their dance, or sing their song, and by striving to understand what all of them are trying to say. This is not just the lesser evil, or a concession to the limitations of our being. Pluralism is an exigency rooted in the pluralistic nature of reality. Pluralistic Man renders false all the absolutisms, fanaticisms, and reductionisms to artificial unities. Only the one is nondualistic. There is no second Man, Truth, or God; but we do not exhaust what Man is, or Truth, or God. There is no second Man, God, or Truth, but Man is not monistic, nor God monotheistic, nor Truth monolithic. A reasoning reason that closes or locks our awareness or comprehension into *one* intelligibility is a plain fallacy. There is a kind of *perichôrêsis*, a "dwelling within one another," of these three dimensions of Reality: the Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic—the *I*, the *you*, and the *it*.

Aliud and Alter

I have said that pluralism is a myth and have tried to describe the outline of it. We may now go back and ask this myth what it tells us theoretically, what it does for us practically, and how it looks as a myth for our times.

The Awareness of Otherness and of the Other: Aliud et Alius

That the problem of pluralism is the question of the other needs some further elaboration. First of all, it is the question of an awareness of otherness (*aliud*). This is more than just an awareness of differences, necessary for the recognition of any plurality. It is an awareness that there are or there may be other entities besides those which we take into account, the awareness that *logos* is other than mere reason, Man other than *logos*, and Being other than Man; it ultimately implies an awareness that I (my reason, my consciousness, my being) do not exhaust the real nor am its center—but only one of its poles, if anything at all. There is another: *aliud*, otherness, and this not only besides the *my* and the *me*, but also against them and even beyond them. Solipsism is asphyxia. Or, using an Upanishadic metaphor, the windows of the senses, including the spiritual senses, not only allow us to peep into the outer world but allow the world to penetrate into us as well. I am not alone. Solitude, which allows me to be myself, is not to be confounded with isolation, which would suffocate my own being. Pluralism begins with the recognition of otherness, which already implies my sameness. I am in relation.

But this is not all. The *aliud* is not the *alius*; otherness is not *the* other. The other, the other subject of love and knowledge, the other person, is not pure otherness. Even more, the other does not see himself as other, but as *ego*, as I myself see myself. To have treated the other as otherness instead of an *alius*, to have reified the other and not to have allowed him a place in myself is one of the greatest confusions the human being can fall into. It is true that Western and Eastern traditions ask me to love my fellow being as *myself*; but we fix walls of separation and at best allow him to be an-other with the same rights as myself—without, however, sharing in the Self.

I have already made a passing reference to the impoverishment of modern languages, amounting to a human catastrophe of cosmic proportions, in their loss of the dual and treating of the *you* as an *it* (in spite of calling it he or she). The reason for the dual is not concern for two as a number as many grammars still blindly repeat *non mi è chiara questa frase*. Why not, then, also a case for three and four and so on? One may infer, therefore, that grammarians welcome the simplification of language; the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, for instance, includes no entry for dual, apparently considering it unworthy of attention. The reason for the dual is to allow expression of the I-Thou: the you is not an it. I speak, you speak, they speak, but we-two speak; and even when they-two speak, the connotation is different from the speaking of they—the many. The moment that the other becomes the you, all changes. The awareness of the other as other (*alius*) and not just as otherness makes of him a fellow, a companion, a subject (and not an object), a source of knowledge, a principle of initiative as I myself am. This alone allows me to listen to the other, to be known by him and not just to know him. There can be no true pluralism until the other is discovered. I mean the other (*alius*) as source of (self) understanding and not only as term (*aliud*) of intelligibility.

This other does not always need to be a good fellow, a person with good intentions, or with the same feelings I have and the same opinions I hold. The other can be my enemy—although always with a human face, a Thou and not an it, an anonymous entity beneath the clouds or inside the house or shelter that I bomb from miles above. . . .

Does pluralism allow us to deal with conflictual situations? This is something I have already indicated and may now elaborate a little more.

Dialogical Tension Instead of Dialectical Conflict

This contrast between the dialectical and the dialogical modes of dwelling in our pluralistic reality may be the great difficulty and yet it is the proof of all that I have tried to say. Not accepting the dialectical conflict and transforming it into *adialogical tension*—is this not what the Christian and Jain martyrs, for instance, did, and what contemporary dissidents are still doing? The risk is real. What is a tiny little group or an individual before the Kremlin, the Pentagon, a powerful corporation, an all-powerful bureaucratic machinery? The prophetic role of Man here comes to the fore, and you cannot be a prophet of mere reasonableness, or of statistical probabilities, or of economic calculations, however learned you may be. To accept the dialectical strategy, important as it is in its own realm, only produces a regression to never-ending pendular reactions when extended into the total human situation. Let me submit a few considerations on this dialogical way of dealing with conflicting positions:

1. A pluralistic society can only subsist if it recognizes a center that transcends the understanding of it by any particular member or even by the totality of the members at any given moment. If king, party, or people are the absolute sovereign, there may be tolerance but not pluralism. Only an open society can be pluralistic, but this needs a transcendent force to prevent it from closing on its own self-interpretation. If we do not accept an un-understandable transcending point, then obviously, if I am right, you are wrong, and we cannot accept any higher qualifying understanding of our respective positions.

2. The recognition of this center is a given fact, a gift (theologically speaking). It implies a certain degree of awareness, which differs according to time, place, and the individuals concerned, that is never covered by the object of awareness; in other words, pluralism assumes that there is always a remnant of (pure) consciousness that is not "consciousness of."

Example: If the welfare of the Basque people cannot be separated from the independence of the Basque nation, and this is seen as an absolute and nondebatable value, any conflict with it will have to yield uncompromisingly to the supreme value, and conflict with Spain will be inevitable. If the United States of America is an absolute sovereign nation, it will not tolerate any conflict of interest that puts in jeopardy the welfare of that nation. If you feel threatened to death and your life is for you an absolute value, you will have to yield to such a threat.

3. The way to handle a pluralistic conflict is not through each side trying to convince the other, nor by the dialectical procedure alone, but through a *dialogical dialogue* that leads to a mutual opening up to the concern of the other, to a sharing in a common charisma, difficulty, suspicion, guidance, inspiration, light, ideal, or whatever higher value both parties acknowledge and neither party controls. The dialogical dialogue is art as much as it is knowledge, involves *techné* and *praxis* as much as *gnôsis* and *theoria*. The difficulty is to reenact it, even when one of the partners refuses to enter into such a relation.

Example: If the Pope's infallibility is essential to Christianity according to Roman Catholics and is only a historical accident according to Protestants, no way out of the impasse will be found through argument alone; also required will be a common search in loyalty to a common spirit superior to both parties.

4. Not only discussion but also prayer, not mere words but perhaps silence, not decisions but rather allowing situations to take care of themselves, not authority but a mutual and higher obedience, not knowing solutions but mutual searching, not mere exegesis of rules or constitutions, but freedom of initiative even at the risk of rupture, and so on, are the proper attitudes in dealing with truly pluralistic problems (not to be confused with problems of pluriformity). The pluralistic attitude does not assume a priori nonnegotiable issues. It is in each case a new creation.

Example: If the corpuscular physical theory of matter and energy seems incompatible with the wave theory, it is fitting to hold in abeyance any ultimate explanation and wait, until some further input may solve the problem or shift the question.

5. There is a continuum between pluriformity and pluralism, and the dividing line is a function of time, place, culture, society, and the spiritual resistance and flexibility of the particular group, tribe, province, or individuals involved. What for some is merely an issue of pluriformity is for others a problem of pluralism. Whoever sees a particular issue as one of pluriformity should not forget that for the other party the issue may appear to be of an altogether different nature, and thus needs to be dealt with in a different way.

Example: For one party, marriage is a permanent sacrament, and a transient contract is—and was—no marriage; for the other party, permanent and transitory marriages may simply be different types of marriage. A pluralistic problem arises when we do not agree regarding the very essence of what we are discussing—marriage, democracy, justice, Christianity, goodness. . . .

6. The problem of pluralism need not always be solved by maintaining unity. Each human group has its own proper coefficient of coherence, uniformity, and harmony. What may not break up the unity of a culture or religion may very well disrupt a nation or a church. The strength of this coefficient is again a given—a gift—and yet one may reinforce it. The spiritual attitude of the members of a society positively influences the strength of this coefficient. As a general rule, each society should strive to be as pluralistic as it can allow itself to be. But each society has its own limits.

Example: A modern group within a traditionally celibate religious congregation may wish to have married people as full-fledged members of the same institution. Some congregations may be so structured existentially as to allow it, whereas others may have to start a new foundation altogether.

The occasion is too tempting not to bring in another instructive example: as anybody in India knows, and the last chapters of the second book of the Rāmāyana so forcefully reiterate, the husband is the highest deity (*param daivatam patih*) for the wife and should be loved whether he is bad tempered or poor, or even licentious and disloyal. We should say the same of the husband regarding the wife, but this is not my point. My point is that equilibrium is easy to maintain within equity and when equality is present: I am loyal to you because you also keep your fidelity. The problem arises when you are no longer that trustworthy person. We may divorce, part, break the unity (of family, country, church, group, or association), but we cannot keep unity if one of the parties has not decided to stay through "thick and thin." Should we—or anyone else—disarm even if the adversary goes on accumulating weapons?

7. The passage, the *Pascha* from plurality to pluriformity and thence to pluralism, belongs to the growing pains of creation, to the very dynamism of the universe.

Example: The monolithic character of the Catholic Church some decades ago and its plurifaceted aspect today, the totalitarian nation-state of some centuries ago and its evolution into liberal democracy, offer instances of this "transit."

The Exigencies of Pluralism

I would like to conclude by citing one of the most daring sentences of Jesus's *kérygma*, which comes at a certain moment in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not resist evil!" (Mt 5:39). If we take these words to mean what they say, either the foolishness, or the optimism, or the innocence behind them is unfathomable . . . or else the whole thing is nonsensical. I

suggest a neither/nor answer to this dilemma, and consider these words an adequate motto for our meditation on pluralism.

"Do not resist, do not oppose evil." We may translate with the Revised Version—"Resist not him that is evil"—or with the New English Bible—"Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you," as the word can mean evil, the devil, or a wicked man: however, the third reading is to be preferred, as text and context show. We may oppose evil, we have to resist the devil as James says, but we should not withstand the man who does evil; instead we should turn the other cheek and, offering him our coat as well, go along the extra mile. Why? Because otherwise you will be drawn into the dialectical game; you will have to build another power to oppose the first one. Thus from reaction to counterreaction, from swing to counter-swing, we have the all-too-familiar pendular movement of the world. "God" was with the right, now "God" is with the left; at first the males dominated, now some females want to do the bossing; the colonial powers have exploited other peoples, now the other peoples are going to kick back with whatever arms they have at their disposal . . . and we go on and on and on. "Now it is our turn to build the Tower of Babel up to paradise! We, the Proletariat, the Chinese, the Liberals, Scientists . . ." Yet we read: Do not stand against an evil action because evil can only be resisted by evil and two evils do not make a good; because evil is not an absolute, and, exasperating the evil Man by resisting him, you only increase evil—by opposing it, you are contaminated by it. If somebody hits you, there is no end to the retaliation until you have piled up bigger bombs that will destroy us all. If you do not stop this flow of bad *karma* by ceasing to assimilate and embrace it, the end will be the destruction of the world. Christians speak of the Lamb that has taken upon himself the sins of the cosmos; Buddhists set universal *karuṇā* or compassion as the only way to universal enlightenment, to mention just two universalistic religions. Or, as the *Rāmāyana* says, mercy to all beings is the highest virtue (*bhūta-dayā-param*).

"Do not resist the evil man." Once you declare war on evil, you become not only immersed in but also dependent on it. You are no longer free to live on your terms. You are caught in the net of the evil itself, and it is irrelevant whether you win or are defeated. The poison is already in you. Evil can be fought and even negated only on its own plane. You can no longer overcome it. The "strategy" should be a more subtle one. "Do not resist the evil man" because evil is not an absolute. Overcome it but do not be tainted by it, do not fall into the temptation to fight back, to hit as you are beaten, to enter the only place that evil allows you to move: its own arena. This is not minimizing the power of evil. You have to be very firmly grounded not to yield to the allure of evil. Is it not true that when we decide to fight evil, we "think" we are going to be the winners and defeat evil? A defeated evil permeates the entire body of the victor, as any historian knows. We are difficult to convince only when we are intoxicated by the thought of the possible victory: we are really not so pure and uncontaminated. Or, in philosophical terms, often misinterpreted: evil is not a separate and positive entity but only a privation. And you do not directly fight an absence. Otherwise, how could the author of the words just quoted have said in the most decisive moment of his life, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34)? Only forgiveness cancels evil.

I am not saying we should be indifferent to evil or abolish all value judgments. I am not defending sheer passivity in front of, say, Nazism (it is always more comfortable to speak of things past—should I have said, instead, communism? capitalism? military regimes?). I am saying that the way to struggle with what everyone considers the forces of evil is not by dialectically opposing to evil what we believe to be nonevil, but by transforming, converting, convincing, evolving, contesting—and all this mainly from within, as leaven, as witness, as martyr.

This is not the time for an exegesis. It is well known that the *antistēnai* in the Gospel according to St. Matthew does not have a Hebrew equivalent. The so-called nonresistance to evil or to the Evil One could be interpreted as not making haste to do evil, and thus to break the circle of vanquishing evil with evil. Jesus is not promoting passivity or fatalism, but invites us not to play the game with the evil one.

Pluralism, therefore, does not mean that we recognize many ways (plurality) but that we detect many forms that we cannot recognize as ways leading to the goal. Pluralism does not mean just tolerance of the many ways.

After our accumulated experience of the fiasco of other aggressive means that were supposed to be more effective and immediate, we may be readier today to handle human conflicts by increasing our own energy and capacity for endurance so as to be able to carry the burden without being crushed by it, to assume and assimilate evil rather than add our own energy as extra fuel for its fire. Here again, drinking the poison without being harmed by it has always been one of the signs of those who believe. To take the poison into oneself, like Shiva, to assimilate evil is a type of tolerance that naturally requires a deeper penetration into the nature of Man and reality and a stronger grasp on the source of inner power. This is maybe where we begin to glimpse the proportions of a radical *metanoia*: not just a change in Man only, or the world only, or God only, but in all three dimensions of Reality, in harmony and cooperation. The Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, the goat that is sacrificed on neutral ground, the holocaust that is carried out for the salvation of the people are all nonviolent or less violent attempts to deal with conflicts, rather than annihilating the enemy. They are nondialectical ways of handling a conflict; they act through assimilation rather than opposition, not through countermeasures but through redemption, or taking the common burden onto one's own shoulders, not through the defeat of the adversary but through a (reciprocal) conversion on a higher level.

The "realist" will immediately remind me that we are not God, and that with pacifist attitudes like this we just confuse any distinction between good and evil. Can we break India up into more or less a dozen states, undermine the role of the United States as the guardians of democracy, ruin Catholicism, destroy society, allow criminals (always the others) to annihilate us, pervert human institutions, and allow chaos to rule the world?

True to the method that I proposed, I will not simply oppose my thesis to questions like these. I will first reexamine my position and try to agree on where the demarcation line should be drawn (in the sense that pluralism has defined limits for each situation). Second, I would invite the readers to see whether the current method, by which violence is met with violence, has given more effectual results. It could be that the "chaos" we are warned against proves to be better than the apparent existing peace achieved through institutional violence, in times when, in absolute figures, there have never been so many human beings in chains, desperate and suffering. Third, it would be an *in adiecto* contradiction to impose nonviolent methods.

To the first point one could reply that only an infinite being, certainly, can circumscribe goodness and evil, and that each human being and society has its own particular coefficient of magnanimity: only Siva can drink all the poison in the world, or a divine Redeemer can be burdened with all the sins of the world. Inevitably we suffer from our inability to assimilate a bigger portion of evil into our metabolism. As to the second point, we should not expect a pure theoretical perfection, but try lifestyles that are different from those dominated by single immutable principles. The third point should safeguard from the fact that institutionalized nonviolence could become as detrimental as other harder forms of constriction. The establishment of any kind of absolute will lead us to the disappearance of pluralism.

Here is another example: I am convinced that today slavery as a social institution is evil. However, I am also convinced that, at some point in history, most human beings (at least among those who were not slaves) believed that it could be justified. We should not make the methodological mistake I called "catachronic," by judging enormous areas of the past with the yardstick of the present.

My point here is that at that time slavery was not such an intolerable evil, just because most people found it relatively tolerable. Something similar occurs with communism, capitalism, colonialism, apartheid, and the arms race. There are some who consider these conditions as inhuman and cruel as slavery. Others may not be of the same opinion. We can go back to fighting and struggling, build another tower, or we can begin to speak another language and simply refuse to pay taxes or join the army or collaborate with the system and so on. I am convinced that the first method merely perpetuates evil. We learn from the *Rāmāyana* that there was once a pious ascetic who lived his holy life in the forest. The wicked tempter, the divine Indra, showed up at his hermitage disguised as a soldier. He left a splendid sword in the keeping of the sage. With the aim of safeguarding it, the hermit always took it with him wherever he went. Gradually the sage became negligent of his duty and he turned to cruelty and was led into *adharma*, ending up in hell. A word to the wise . . . Or, with the very words of Princess Jānaki: "With great subtlety a noble soul is led into *adharma*." I have said that there is an urgent need for a new imagination, a new vision, of a mystical experience that touches the true core of Reality *kat'exochen*—not only of the human individual or the human race. For at least forty centuries we have been using the method of analysis and the decomposition into parts and, following in Descartes's footsteps, we have become more and more perspicacious about things of less and less importance. We should *not* disparage this procedure, because without it we would not even have survived. But now, perhaps, the time has come to recompose the parts into a new whole that does not disregard diversity, and thus cannot be reduced to some feeble or monolithic uniformity.

Nowadays the human condition should cure us of all unreal and messianic dreams of new world empires, even if heralded by great men, triumphantly trumpeting freedom, God, truth—which are truly positive symbols, but we have not fully attained them, nor do we have a monopoly over them.

I have said that we are dealing with a myth, and a myth is something we can touch without dissolving it. It is something we cannot manipulate. We are not pluralistic if we integrate everything into a "pluralistic" vision of the world. We are pluralistic if we believe that none of us possesses the philosopher's stone, the key to the secret of the world, access to the center of the universe if such there is—by having the restraint not to think through everything lest we destroy the "thought" (*das Gedachte*, not *der Gedanke*) and the thinker. This is not irrationalism. It is intellectual humility or common sense.

Let me say it again in strict philosophical parlance. If we think out (*ausdenken*) the Eucharist, we destroy it; if God, he vanishes; if an atom, it disappears; if a person, we miss him; if a tree, we do not understand it. In other words, thinking has a corrosive power; it destroys what it really thinks through. When it touches the surface of a thing, it is all right—the thing still has a depth untouched by thinking. The price of understanding is that we transform, assimilate, and thus change, absorb, and ultimately destroy the thing understood, making of it an object, a concept, a conception conceived by our thinking. As long as we do not think a thing exhaustively, that thing still stands outside our thinking—that is, exists (*ek-sists*, sticks its neck out). But by this very fact, we gain a decisive insight regarding the nature of reality. It is this: The criterion of reality is precisely to be "thought-proof"—namely, resistant to thinking. When something does not obey our thinking, when it offers resistance, it shows its

reality by this very fact. Indeed we cannot "think through" (in the sense of think exhaustively) the Eucharist or God or an atom, a person, or a tree. They offer resistance of another type from that of, say, a triangle or a logical syllogism. These latter are unfathomable; they yield more and more, and we do not discover their limits; there may always be more properties to a triangle and more refinements to a logical argument. They offer the resistance of the Siberian forest: there is nobody there and you do not know what is beyond and if it will ever end. The former offer the resistance of the Chinese Wall. You know that all the glory of the empire is behind it and that you cannot break the wall. But you also know that if you succeed you will have destroyed the Kingdom of the Rising Sun. A tree, for instance, simply stops our thinking at a certain point. It possesses an enclosure forbidden to or rather impenetrable to our thinking. If we could think it through, we would destroy the tree (and some of you may recall the power of *tapas* and concentration); the tree would become totally an object of our mind. This is the fundamental difference between an idea of God, which has infinite possibilities, and a real God who stops and silences our thinking.

This limit is something that nothing can impose on us except the resistance of the thing itself. And paradoxically (as I have already suggested), we are then convinced that the thing is true and exists; we are convicts, defeated, overpowered by the thing, and our accusations—that is, our categories with which we tried to understand the thing—return to us as if rebounding from the power of the thing themselves. Jacob fought with God in the form of an angel and experienced his reality the next day when he felt that he had been hurt. Human reflection, when it is not a solipsistic spinning on our own constructs, always brings back the scar of the thing it has touched, the thing it has tried to flect, to bend so that it might give us its secret. Reflection hurts more than a laser beam.

If this is the case, the foundation of pluralism implies the recognition of a weakness, not in our mind—so that if we were more intelligent we could come to a single theoretical truth on which all we humans would agree—but in the nature of reality, that is, both in our thinking power and in the things themselves. It is more than an example of perspectivism because in this case we could always argue that, despite the fact that there is another perspective that sees things differently, our own perspective is the proper one for that particular purpose—which is the "real" purpose. To acknowledge different perspectives on a question only shifts the problem because we then have to begin all over again to discuss what the right perspective is for that particular case, and so forth and so on. Pluralism is not the mere justification for a plurality of opinions, but the realization that the real is more than the sum of all possible opinions. The "intelligence" of Laplace cannot exist: it would destroy everything, and besides it would not know itself. There is no "intelligence" as Laplace imagined. Pluralism affirms that Parmenides was wrong, if you will, but that we are equally wrong if we want Heraclitus to contradict him and be right. Reality is not dialectical, although dialectics, of course, has a place in reality.

We may well feel disoriented in the face of so many orients, so many compasses, medicines and prophets. Yet we should not be resigned and try to withdraw into selfish individualisms, but instead recognize that Man himself and Reality are pluralistic (neither monistic nor dualistic), and thus that the immense variety of what appear to be conflicts (when viewed dialectically) can be transformed (I would even say converted, but this is not an automatic process) into *dialogical tensions* and *creative polarities*. All that is needed is for us to experience, to touch, to reach that very core of reality that makes us so differently unique that we are each incomparable, and so uniquely unique that all our differences appear as so many colorful beams of an unfathomable light.

In simpler words, I have said that no group, no truth, no society, ideology, or religion can have a total claim on Man, because Man is ever elusive, not finished, not finite, infinite—still in the making, on the way, itinerant—as is the entire reality in which Man is an *active* participant. It is this free and active participation, and yet only participation, that makes our lives really worth living.

THE DEFIANCE OF PLURALISM

One can understand the unsettling and disturbing effects of pluralism. It defies the dominion of Enlightenment reasoning, which has been entrenched for almost half a millennium now. One can understand why the best "modern" minds warn us against the disturbance of the so painfully obtained philosophical peace. One fears, in fact, that the alternative might be wild irrationalism or sheer superstition. But pluralism challenges the assumption that modern reason is the ultimate and nonnegotiable canvas on which we need to situate our awareness of reality—the myth of reason, I would say. Pluralism dares to defy "Reason," that is, to challenge the faith that we have put in it.

A few years ago, Gerald James Larson provided an incisive and well-organized critique of pluralism in this journal, in which he does me the honor of suggesting that I represent the most sophisticated notion of it.¹

In response, I will try to make myself understood without insisting on what I have written in essays cited and uncited by him. I repeat that the defiance lies in the fact that my hypothesis dares to touch the most treasured principle of the dominant philosophy of our times: "reason, inductive and deductive" as our basic instrument for making sense of reality and configuring human life. My hypothesis goes against the modern scientific paradigm as being the sole serious intellectual exercise; it goes against the dominance of the modern pan-mathematical method. Understanding does not come by calculating. There is a difference between reasoning (*ratio*) and discursive reasoning, induction and deduction (*ratio cinatio*).

Enlightenment is proud of its discoveries. I do not dispute its achievements. I only point out that the price for the so-called critical discovery should not be blindness to other realms of reality including the human reality.

Besides the rather insulting manner in which Enlightenment has characterized its predecessors (obscurantist slumber, superstitious naivete, pre-Copernican *galimatias*), its blind trust in "pure" reason appears rather pedantic today. Other periods were, after all, not so naive.

We may be reminded by the classical *prāmānavāda* of Indic philosophies, or the *triplex oculus* of Christian scholasticism, that uncritical ingenuity has not always been the case. The *mīmāṃsā*, for instance, recognizes *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison), *arthāpatti* (postulation, presumption), *anupalabdhi* (necognition), and *śabda-pramāna* (verbal authority, word). Hugh of St. Victor, as another example, speaks of the *oculus carnis*, *oculus rationis*, and *oculus contemplationis*. In a word, not everything is reducible to reason, although reason may be a necessary fellow traveler in all human transactions. But so are the other two eyes, for that matter. Not all is *logos* in Man, although this is a statement of the *logos*. The *logos*, in stating this, does not deny itself; it transcends and relativizes itself—relativizes, that is, it does not proclaim itself an absolute.

* First published as "The Defiance of Pluralism," *Soundings* 79, no. 1–2 (Spring–Summer 1996): 169–91. This article was written in response to the antipluralist position of Gerald James Larson.

¹ See "Contra Pluralism," *Soundings* 53, no. 2–3 (Knoxville 1990): 303–26; then published in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. J. Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 71–87.

Clarification of the Notion of Pluralism

Reality belongs not only to the realm of the *logos*, but pertains also to the order of the *mythos*, as we said in the preceding chapter.

It should be clear that I do not understand by pluralism what is currently meant nowadays when people speak of a "pluralistic society," "theological pluralism," or pluralisms of many sorts. This usage means a tolerant, open, and a more or less sophisticated stand that encompasses, accepts, or finds a place for a diversity of lifestyles, doctrines, or religions. This is certainly a positive value and an indispensable ethical value, but I understand by pluralism something more basic.²

Pluralism, as a word touching upon the nature of reality, is polysemic. It has a long history. Some pre-Socratics were supposed to be pluralists, and today there is talk about pluralism of all sorts: political, civil, demographic, practical, psychological, ethical, historical, religious, mythical, functional, logical, intellectual, theoretical, epistemological, metaphysical, philosophical, monadological, cultural, harmonic, implicit, mere, relative, utter, absolute, and so forth and so on. Wolff, Kant, Schiller, James, Laski, Scheler, Albert, and many of our contemporaries have dealt thematically with the problem of pluralism.³

Pluralism, as I understand it, today represents the strictest challenge to the monarchy of reason—and ultimately to monotheism.

I take pluralism to be not a particular metaphysical view of the universe (although it may entail one—or many), but a fundamental *human attitude: aptitudo*, that for which I am *aptus*, fit.

The "one and the many" has been, not only since Plato, but already since the ancient Egyptians, a major concern of Western philosophy. Histories of philosophy used to treat pluralism as the third grand system after monism and dualism. We may recall Russell's "absolute pluralism." By using the word "pluralism," on the other hand, I am intending something more than making an objective statement about the world or against the *Identitätsphilosophie* (idealism), the "mono universe" (Davidson's *block universe*), the monistic worldview, or in favor of James's "pluralistic universe"—not to mention all the names we learn from the history of philosophy. All our talk of cross-cultural studies and mutual fecundation would remain barren if we do not have the daring to transgress the cultural frontiers that, like "iron curtains" and "Berlin walls," have been isolating peoples, cultures, and religions.

A cross-cultural incursion into this problematic could use the word "pluralism" to mean *advaita*, although in an original way. Pluralism is not plurality: pluralism suggests that reality is neither one nor many. The Indic mind introducing the word *advaita* stresses the negation of duality (and the consequent temptation is *ekatva*, monism). The homeomorphic Western equivalent could use the word "pluralism" to stress the irreducibility of ultimate worldviews whereby what is ultimate is again subject to (pluralistic) discussion. If *advaita* is qualified monism, pluralism is qualified plurality. But *advaita* could as well be designated as qualified dualism, and pluralism as qualified unity. It is to this depth that the problem of pluralism leads us.

The problem of pluralism is primarily not a question of ethical convenience or political prudence, or even an epistemological answer to the subject-object split, but an ultimate question regarding reality. I shall limit myself here to describing the pluralistic attitude in

² See, for example, my essay "Die Toleranz der Christenheit" in *Pluralismus, Toleranz und Christenheit* (Nürnberg: Abendländische, 1961), 117–42).

³ The bibliography I have collected covers over fifteen pages, and all of the above mentioned adjectives are actually used.

face of conflicting truth claims—to follow the consecrated, although for me unconvincing, language (as if we could make any claim about truth outside its *a-létheia*).

Pluralism takes a critical attitude that does not see the absolute necessity—and eventually the convenience—of reducing everything to one single truth, without for that matter allowing for a proliferation of truths—since every truth has its own field of boundaries. The pluralistic attitude does not suffer from any compelling obsession to reduce everything to absolute unity, without for that matter subscribing to any ultimate duality, since this latter is not the only alternative to monism. The pluralistic attitude accepts the stance that reality may be of such a nature that nobody, and no single human group, can coherently claim to exhaust the universal range of the human experience. Reality is not totally objectifiable because we, the subjects, are also a part of it.

The fact that every human being is a source of self-understanding and that every cultural tradition offers a particular frame (myth) for intelligibility makes objective knowledge incapable of disentangling itself fully from subjective knowledge. Subjective knowledge cannot be reduced to the knowledge of a single subject, even if it were a collective subject. The entire human race at any given time cannot mortgage the future. The logical alternative of positing an absolute subject will not do either. The very act of thinking the One destroys its oneness, splitting the One into the thinker and the thought. The One can only think itself exhaustively if the One is Thought, pure Consciousness, that is, absolute idealism. But if consciousness reflects upon itself, there is already a certain duality that can be overcome only if the Thinking (thinker) and the Thought are identical. Self-consciousness is consciousness of the self, that is, consciousness of itself; or it is the consciousness of a Subject that is pure Consciousness, i.e., subjective genitive. Not without a stringent logic, many schools of Vedānta will state that *brahman* does not know that “it” is *brahman*; being *Īśvara*, *brahman*’s Consciousness.

I am saying that knowledge, by its nature, demands a knower (not necessarily an individualistic one). Any integral knowledge, therefore, cannot prescind the “objective” knowledge from the knowing subject. All knowledge is “personal knowledge,” and this is not an imperfection but a “vital component” of knowledge itself. Pluralism does not make an objective statement about the world. It simply implies the awareness that knowledge is always the knowledge of a subject and that an absolute Subject (assuming it existed) would have only an absolute objective knowledge of all that is knowable. For an absolute knower, object and subject coalesce. But the absolute object of the absolute subject covers the entire reality only under the assumption that reality is totally intelligible, which is what pluralism does not need to assume. The total intelligibility of reality is a gratuitous assumption that is not necessary for the functioning of our mind—unlike, for instance, the principle of noncontradiction. The principle of noncontradiction puts an extrinsic barrier to our reasoning mind: if we think A to be the case, we cannot think the identical A to be a Non-A. The Non-A puts a boundary to our intelligibility of A—which amounts to saying that to know A entails not knowing Non-A. To assume, on the other hand, that reality is absolutely intelligible leaves no room for any unintelligible reality. From this perspective, Non-Being would be an illusion (which would give the *vyāvahārika*⁴ an illusory status in relation to the *pāramārthika*, to speak in Vedantic categories).

Pluralism is incompatible with any absolutism. I am not saying absolute idealism is false; I am stating that it is not warranted. It may be presupposed or posed, but it is not neces-

⁴ The empiric dimension (*vyāvahārika*), as it is illusory and relative, is contrasted by the absolute one (*pāramārthika*) by Sankara and other annotators of the Vedānta.

sary—besides being against immediate human experience. And this is congruent with the idea of the Divine as absolute Freedom.

It may help to describe our understanding of pluralism from a history-of-ideas point of view. In this context I would define culture, over against nature, as the substitution of objects for things.

I take things to be ontic presences in human awareness, and objects to be ontological constructs of reflexive thinking. Nature is a world of things. Things are more or less animate. They have an *animus*. This amounts to saying that things are not only objects, but also subjects. Culture, on the other hand, is a world of objects, *objecto*: "things thrown," put before awareness so that we are capable of thinking about them. These objects are states of consciousness or fields of awareness. Since Socrates in the Western world, and Śākhyā in the Indic scene, the *concept* has taken the upper hand over all other states of consciousness. Now, concepts are a special kind of objects. They are the rational distillate of those states of consciousness that allow themselves to be classified as intelligible units. They do not have a life of their own; they are valid where they have been conceived. Concepts qua concepts need to be immutable, or else conceptual knowledge would be impossible. If a concept changes its meaning, it thus turns into a different concept, sometimes under the same name. We need distinctions.

Culture is the cultivation of nature in order to produce an artificial (I do not say here artificial) universe: the world of objects. Both nature and culture are intertwined. The human is a cultural animal. Its *animus* begets a universe of objects. Humans need to cultivate not only the Earth but also themselves. The human nature is a cultural one. *Cultura animi*, incidentally, is how Cicero defines philosophy. Cultivation of the *ātman* is how we could translate it for the Indic spirit, and *cultura idearum* would be the Socratic-Platonic heritage of Western philosophy. The cultivation of ideas meant cultivation of a real world (and humans in it), as long as ideas were believed to be real entities, but became the cultivation of abstract concepts once the Platonic aura faded away.

Here is where pluralism fits in: in the awareness that the world of objects has no existence of its own. Objects are intellectual entities; they depend on the subject that "puts them before" our awareness. This subject is generally not an individual but a collective society in a given time and place. These intellectual constructs form a more or less complete universe, which is what we generally call the world of culture. Now, the salient feature of our present-day situation is the overwhelming predominance of a single culture. The predominant culture today is a conceptual culture of a Western brand, although extended all over among the "elites" of the world. This particular culture has created the world of concepts where "civilized" human beings live. In this cultural world there is a place for tolerance, dialogue, and condemnation, but there is no room for pluralism. Our modern world is a cultural world of concepts, but concepts, we have already said, are not flexible. The intrinsic intentionality of a concept is to be univocal. We may replace concepts with better ones, or make a conceptual distinction, splitting a single concept into two if need be. It is evident, however, that in a conceptual culture there is hardly a place for pluralism as coexistence of cultures.

Pluralism entails the recognition that there may be several centers of intelligibility, that the world in which we live is not only a world of concepts but also of subjects—and subjects cannot be co-opted into objects, and much less into concepts, without ceasing to be subjects.

Another important chapter related to pluralism should at least be mentioned. This chapter is, of course, the founded mistrust of reason and the ambivalence of the human imagination. I have in mind, first of all, the symbolic awareness developed in the twelfth-century philosophers, the *idola* of Francis Bacon, the views of Luther on reason, the critique of all systems by Condillac, and the overall attacks of Nietzsche among many others. Perhaps, after all, our

reason is neither so "pure" nor so powerful. But we will not open this chapter of Western thought, which would make our criticism much easier, because we defend pluralism even within the strictest assumptions of reason.

Basically, I understand by pluralism that *fundamental human attitude* that is critically aware both of the factual irreducibility (thus incompatibility) of different human systems purporting to render reality intelligible, and of the radical nonnecessity of reducing reality to one single center of intelligibility, thus making an *absolute* decision in favor of a particular human system with universal validity—or even one Supreme Being—unnecessary.

In saying that it is a *fundamental attitude*, I am suggesting that it does not belong to any particular conceptual construction. Saying that it is a *human* attitude implies that it is existentially human, and that we are conscious of it. Now, this awareness is critical and twofold. "Critical" here means reflexive and aware of its need for foundation. "Twofold" means that this awareness is both conscious of its own perspective and of its relativity.

The critical foundation of pluralism consists in applying to itself what it criticizes in all systems, that any foundation is simply a place where we halt because we think that it does not need any further foundation. This can be only a belief that may act as a pragmatic postulate based on what I have called cosmic confidence.

Concerning this twofold awareness, we may say this much. The first awareness (perspectivism) offers no major difficulty. We, from the vantage point of our particular system, detect the incompatibility between our belief-system and another one. We may hold, for instance, to the metaphysical correspondence between Thinking and Being or the cosmological belief in a Supreme Being. From these perspectives, a nonunivocal view of the relation between Consciousness and Reality, or a nonmonotheistic belief is incompatible with the first stance. The respective systems—each from the other viewpoint—cannot both be true. We shall stick to one and judge the other ultimately false—although we are aware that our two different metaphysical options are due to a diverse perspective on those very issues. We would look then into why one perspective appears to be more plausible than the other and either shift the discussion to that ground or recognize the relative validity of the other perspective. We come here to our second point.

The second awareness (relativity) is more complex. Let us imagine three mutually irreducible views of reality: A, B, and C. From the perspective of system B we may see not only the falsity of systems A and C, but also their evil consequences. We shall refute those systems and, if we can, we shall also combat them with the means that, according to our system, are truthful, ethical, and effective. Up to here there is not yet pluralism. Pluralism appears when we critically realize that our standpoint and our system cannot claim to be so absolute as to judge the others as *absolutely* untrue or evil. Pluralism struggles against absolutism not by an (equally absolute) antiabsolutism, but by relativizing all absolutisms by means of searching for their contextuality.

Roman Christianity during the European Middle Ages held that Islam was a false religion, and heretics more harmful to the people than "terrorists" today. The Church safeguarded the intimacy of human conscience so that a bona fide Muslim or a condemned heretic could still go straight to heaven (*de internis non iudicat Ecclesia*), but the *bonum commune* demanded they should be persecuted or punished—as in the modern prison system. The Roman Church, because of its belief in the unfathomable divine transcendence, did not pronounce an absolute judgment. In this sense it held a certain transcendent pluralism, but politically and doctrinally it was not pluralist.

The pluralistic attitude has its origin in human praxis, and it entails two insights: first, that our knowledge is not absolute, and second, that the knowledge represented by systems

A and C has other subjects of understanding and self-understanding so that we, from our vantage point, cannot claim to represent the totality of the situation—although, on our part, we shall oppose those systems.

Another example may clarify this point. Let us assume that I believe the capitalist system to be theoretically wrong and ethically evil. I hold a belief system that justifies the anticapitalist stance. I shall direct all my endeavors to dismantle the capitalistic ideology, and I shall use those means that are congruent with my worldview. I may believe in the power of ideas, or in the effectiveness of political pressure, or in the force of disruption, or whatever.

A nonpluralistic attitude will try to uncover the anthropological and metaphysical roots of capitalism and, if successful, eventually come to the conclusion that the notion of the human and of reality implied in capitalism is absolutely wrong, even if disguised by the many layers of mediations. The fight will be to the bitter end—only deterred by strategies of how to attain the best results by eliminating capitalism.

A pluralistic attitude will also fight capitalism, but it will ponder the fact that an important group of people does not share such a negative opinion—although our “hero” will denounce the obnoxious motives hidden behind the capitalist ideology. Nevertheless, our staunch anticapitalist will recognize the fact that some people—not only in good conscience, but with what appear to them to be good reasons—continue to defend capitalism. The outcome will be to relativize one’s own stance and yet to continue fighting capitalism. The dialogical and also dialectical are here called for, as well as a praxis changing the entrenched structures of capitalism. But the pluralist is equally aware that utterly destroying capitalism may also harm his or her own anticapitalist stance. The struggle will go on; although not to a full-fledged *guerra* (war), certainly not to a full, absolute crusade to crush the “evil.” The pluralist will be forced to recognize (I spoke of the role of the praxis) that the capitalist system is also a “legitimate” option *in the eyes of its defenders*. This will lead to a relativization of both one’s own and others’ positions, making room for a common agonistic arena. It may lead to a shifting of one or both positions, or perhaps not, though theoretically the possibility remains open. Eventually the destructive tensions may turn into creative polarities. One may not see how this is feasible, but the possibility is not excluded a priori. Pluralism does not solve the dilemma, but it prevents the reduction of reality to “lemmas.”

It is clear that, in this sense, pluralism cannot be a super system. It has nothing to do with “an underlying identity to religious diversity.” There is no “fundamental pluralist insight.” We cannot manipulate pluralism as a dialectical factor; we cannot rally pluralists against nonpluralists. There cannot be a “theoretical pluralism,” understanding “theory” in a restricted way different from the classical *theoria*. Pluralism is a human attitude, not a “theoretical system.” As I have said time and again, it entails the acceptance of the “irreducibility of praxis to theory.” The praxis presents us with unforeseen and insoluble problems, and we cannot postpone *ad kalendas graecas* the concrete decisions of our lives. Pluralism, in a way, shatters the eschatological expectations that lurk behind so many desacralized and religious behaviors: “We do not know today but Science will solve ‘it’ . . . in the future”; “meanwhile, I obey the Church, the scientific establishment, or follow the status quo.”

Pluralism makes us aware of our contingency, that is, of our limitations, and shows us how to cope with a lack of total security and certainty, and how to live with our vulnerability. Experience begins to convince us that an escalation of defenses of all types and a proliferation of suspicion have a contrary effect. In pluralism we take our stance and risk our life.

This sociological comment leads me to a more metaphysical consideration. I fully agree with Heidegger, and with so many others since Heraclitus’s famous *πάντα ῥεῖ* (*panta rei*) in Greece (*Fragments* 12, 49, 91, etc.), and the *Nāsadīyasūkta* (Rig Veda X.129) in India, that

the *logos* is a dynamic force that never ceases to reveal (*ἀληθής*) itself in unending process. I take for granted that we cannot freeze the *logos*; that truth, even the "smallest" truth, is always infinite and ultimately mysterious; that there is a *fluxus quo* that will never permit us to freeze anything real; that reality and the *logos* itself are open-ended. But pluralism affirms more, not less, than this. It affirms more than an eschatological stance—even if the *ἐσχάτον* is "never" to come. For intrinsic coherence I do not speak of an opacity of the *logos*. *Logos* for me entails intelligibility, and the *logos* would cease to be *logos* if it were not intelligible. An unintelligible *logos* (*quoad se* and not *quoad nos*) would represent a contradiction in terms. But I do not subscribe to a panlogicism. I am aware of the limits of the *logos*. Being has a partial opacity that remains outside the light of the *logos*—or in Christian terms, because the Father, while equal to the Son (*Logos*), is *not* the Son. I do not speak of opacity of the *logos*, but I believe that I have insisted enough in saying that the *logos* is not the whole of Man nor of reality and protested against the totalitarian pretensions of a certain *logos*.

We can, of course, maintain that pluralism is wrong and give our reasons. These will amount to saying that "our" system, or basic-mini-system, is true, and thus any other explanation must be short of the truth. I have said "basic-mini-system" in order to make room for the most common objection against pluralism, namely that some underlying principles are common to all because they belong to human nature. They form the human core that defies pluralism: "Don't kill your father," "Two and two are four," "We all want to eat."

This brings me again to the point regarding myth: any basic system is valid only within a particular myth. It is the prevalent myth at a certain period or place, but the myth is not universal. We all know that there have been civilizations that considered it necessary and merciful to kill the father-figure of the king, and there have been other peoples who have not accepted the translatability into numerical figures of any real thing, so that two houses are not only unequal to two pigs but also to two other houses. The basic system is accepted only within a certain myth, even if we call it the degree of evolution of human consciousness or simply progress. We well know that progress is a myth not shared by all. We all want to eat, up to the point that this wish does not interfere with our *samlekhana* (ritual progressive fasting unto death), our political agitation, our recovery of health, or whatever.

Human invariants should not be confounded with "cultural universals." The former exist (everybody speaks, eats, sleeps, rejoices . . .). The latter do not (every culture speaks a language, and has a specific understanding of the meaning of eating, sleeping, rejoicing . . .).

To be sure, there is a "transcendental relationship" between human invariants and cultural universals. This means that we cannot speak of the former without the language of the latter, that is, outside a particular language. In other words, the (universal) human invariant is a formal concept—meaningful only in a particular material concept belonging already to one culture (or group of them).

Let me repeat that, for me, pluralism is neither *necessarily* the celebration of variety nor *always* to be desired. It may be so sometimes, especially when confronted with exclusivistic and fanatical or narrow-minded approaches, but in general it is a scandal to human thought, a challenge to human intelligence, and a thorn to any culture. Pluralism is rather the acknowledgment of our contingency, of our limitation, of our inability to handle the problems as we would like to solve them. It is the often painful but possibly cathartic revelation (if the word is permitted without fundamentalist underpinnings) of the other, who is inassimilable to us. And yet, the other may be wrong, evil, an obstacle for consensus or for any sensible progress. But who is going to deny that this is precisely the actual human condition?

Let me be precise:

1. No single religion as such can be pluralistic. Religions can (and I add, should) be open, tolerant, not absolutistic, but each religion has a set of beliefs, practices, and rules that may be different and even contradictory to the corresponding features of another religion. Pluralism has nothing to do with a superficially conciliatory eclecticism.

2. No single philosophy as such can be pluralistic either. The moment that we formulate whatsoever, we do it claiming truth, in a language and within a framework that is our context and, even if we claim universality, this is *our claim*, which is not identical with an actual universality.

3. Pluralism is not a super-system, a meta-language, a referee in human disputes, an intellectual panacea. Pluralism is an open human attitude, which therefore entails an intellectual dimension that overcomes any kind of solipsism, as if we—any we—were alone in the universe, the masters of it, the holders of the Absolute. While we can understand plurality (it is simply a fact), we cannot coherently understand pluralism (as a system). A pluralistic system would be an ideology in the pejorative sense of the word, a procrustean bed into which we fit contradictory diversities just to serve our purposes, a super-system artificially concocted to dominate a given situation. In this sense, I am "contra Pluralism." For decades I have lived with universalistic Roman Catholics and inclusivistic Vedantins. As I have argued—sometimes exciting the *furor theologicus* of "orthodox" Hindūs and Catholics—the famous simile of the elephant in a dark room (identified diversely as a pillar, a gigantic bust, an ivory piece, etc.) is the most blatant example of an antipluralistic attitude: all the others are partial, all say some truth, but only I (we) know the whole elephant. The authentic pluralist knows that she does not know the elephant either, and, based on the testimony of the others, doubts that anybody knows the elephant. She assumes further that the "elephant" that Vedantins, Catholics, skeptics, philosophers . . . claim to know may well be either an empty concept or another part of a still more complete living Being.

4. In this objective sense I am not a pluralist; nobody is a pluralist. My opinions, beliefs, philosophy, or religion are as limited, vulnerable, debatable, and subject to critique as any other. I am not saying that there are not people claiming to know the whole elephant, or that they are wrong. I am saying that they are not pluralists.

Methodological Remarks

Pluralism is an attitude, the study of which obviously elicits a peculiar method. This method is the dialogical dialogue, which I have described several times. It does not preclude criticism and refutation. It only precludes blank condemnation, absolute verdicts, total breakdown in communication, or the demand for unconditional surrender. It does not exclude the dialectical approach, but it is not reducible to it.

In the preceding section we have been unearthing the metaphysical implication of pluralism. We can always look for a metaphysical "foundation" of any human act. But pluralism, as an attitude, has a kind of freewheeling value that makes it useful as a method, even while subscribing to other metaphysical assumptions. It is the method of peaceful approach, dialogical dialogue, two-way learning, mutual respect, and the like. It prevents us from fanaticisms of all kinds.

Pluralism entails a method, but it does not offer an alternative to the existing systems. To the hypothesis of the "universal theology of religion," the pluralistic critique does not consist in offering a "pluralistic theology of religion," but in criticizing the absolute claims of any given "universal theology of religion." This is a statement of fact. There are diverse theologies

of religion and also other homeomorphic equivalents. This does not mean that any theology of religion should not attempt to cover the widest possible range of data and interpretations, not claim validity and not present itself as having a relative universality. It means that any such "theology of religion" is conscious of the radical relativity of its assumptions and starting points, beginning with the limitations of the words "theology" and "religion."

I pay attention to methodology because we need a multiperspectival and cross-cultural approach to world problems. For me this is urgent, important—and obvious. What the pluralistic attitude does is to prevent, with intrinsic reasons, any method or set of methods from declaring itself sufficient to approach a problem. Here we touch questions of praxis of immense relevance. Peace and conflict resolution demand such a pluralistic attitude.

Dialogical and Dialectical Response

The preceding pages may have clarified my position and perhaps dispelled some misunderstandings. I would like now to address the thoughtful article of Gerald Larson. I begin with a sense of gratitude and, startlingly enough, of fellowship in the same struggle for what the Greeks called *akribia*, and which Hegel might have translated *Anstrengung des Begriffs* (as he called philosophy). I have, in fact, the feeling that Larson is fighting a different pluralism, so that we might have a purely semantic discrepancy. Nevertheless, for the sake of further clarification, I can try to respond (1) *dialogically* and (2) *dialectically*.

I am happy to have elicited Larson's brilliant critique. I shall attempt here what I have called the dialogical dialogue. It may very well be that Larson sees more than I am capable of seeing in my defense of pluralism. I sense that he fears I may end by condoning evil, tampering with truth, and falling into relativism, that I may be incapable of taking a stance, and so amorphous as to put up with everything, contributing thus in a nefarious way to present-day disorientation in theory and praxis, in religion and politics, in life in general.

To reassert that this is not my intention is obvious to me. I have, nevertheless, to ask myself whether my position leads to what Larson fears and I abhor. We have then already a point of convergence. A second point of agreement is that neither of us would like to abandon rationality and fall into irrationalism.

Being coherent with a pluralistic attitude, I have to say that I agree with him that "there is no such thing as a theoretical pluralist position." It would be a contradiction in terms. I did write something similar when criticizing Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamika* as interpreted by T. R. V. Murti. However, the negation of theoretical pluralism is not synonymous with the statement that pluralism, as I have described it, has no philosophical basis or that it cannot be defended philosophically—where, of course, the notion of philosophy is not restricted to rationalism.

Larson links pluralism to a "literally mindless ideology" of a decadent moment in world history in which Marxism is bankrupt and no other alternative is in view. Pluralism makes "a virtue out of necessity." Two comments are in place here, one positive and one negative.

To make a virtue out of necessity is the most realistic attitude, probably the most humane, and certainly one of the pivots of a critical sociology of knowledge. We do not live in utopia, we do not philosophize *in vacuo*, we do not think outside of and independently from our factual situation. It is certainly true that pluralism, right or wrong, is the cry of the hour, the need of the day. It is praxis that triggers theory, which subsequently conditions praxis. Our discourse would have been impossible at the high pitch of European Enlightenment a couple of centuries ago. Colonialism, which I have defined as the belief in the monomorphism of culture, would not allow any talk about pluralism. But it is interesting and revealing that

Larson quotes this ancient proverb disapprovingly, as if virtue would fall directly from heaven. To make a virtue out of necessity is not necessarily a vice.

The negative comment is the following. I have a different reading of the world situation and would not be overly obsessed with the allegedly last gasps of Marxism, and thus interpret the mainly political phenomena of our times as the failure of the pluralisms of the left and of the right. At any rate, my notion of pluralism does not marginalize "intellectual life." On the contrary, it may offer something to say, something very critical, regarding the Gulf War and the "New World Order." It may provide the nerve to resist the bulldozing of the mind and the triumphalism of well-intentioned attempts at establishing an earthly paradise on a global basis. Unless we take a pluralistic attitude, intellectually analyzing the political problems of the world, we face the danger of becoming either mere lackeys of the present system or angry contestants of the status quo, with no possibility of dialogue.

The shortest philosophical formulation of the pluralistic attitude would probably be the statement that the very nature of truth is pluralistic. But pluralism would never affirm that truth is plural. The interplay between *mythos* and *logos* is present in all our intellectual enterprise. Some fifty years ago I wrote an essay that was the fruit of my religious experience: truth cannot be a merely essential aspect of reality. It has an existential character as well. Simplifying and cutting through the jungle of present and past discussions on the nature of truth, I would come to the following summary: *Truth is self-identity*. This purports to be, of course, a phenomenological statement. The ontological statement would be: *Truth is the manifestation of that self-identity*. And the epistemological formulation would affirm that *truth is the intellectual formulation of that same self-identity*. This was an ancient tradition still clearly echoed by Comenius when saying that "truth is the link (*vinculum*) of beings" (*Ianua rerum* XIV.9). It can only be the bond of a thing with itself, its self-identity. The Sanskrit expression of truth (if we translate it this way) says clearly that truth is the very "beingness" of the thing: *satyam*, real, actual, true. Untruth, on the other hand, is not "unbeing" or "unbeingness," but disorder: *anṛtam* (falsehood), which is *anṛtu* (out of season). Untruth is something contrary to the cosmic order (*ṛta*), disturbing the harmony of reality.

We could also draw from the wisdom of the Latin-Greek tradition. I am not playing with words, but I refuse to bracket existential life from philosophy. I am not arguing with concepts like computer algorithms; I am dealing with human experiences as they appear in critical thinking. Identity, *idem*, is the *conformitas rei cum se ipsa*. The opposite of self-identity is *inauthenticity*, that is, something that lacks *autos*, being itself. And, if it is correct that the *au-tos* is related to Sanskrit *asus* (*asubh*), something inauthentic would suggest something lacking life. The contrary of life would then be death. Truth and life hang together—and life is undoubtedly pluralistic. In a word, truth is pluralistic because self-identity is irreducible to anything else. We are far from playing with concepts.

We should avoid the confusion between reality and conceptual scaffoldings. The statement that truth itself is pluralistic does not mean that all truth is plural. There are not many truths. This would be a contradiction *in adiecto*. Similarly, truth is not one either. Either this is a barren tautology (truth is truth), or a dogmatic position (truth is one) postulating that a being can only manifest itself in one and the same way. We may notice again the captivity of Being under the power of Thinking. The statement that truth is pluralistic means that the self-identity of each and every being is precisely self-identity because it is irreducible to any alterity. Truth is not an *aliud* of the thing but its own *id ipsum*.

The truth of every being makes its uniqueness, and thus its dignity. It cannot be replaced by anything else; it cannot be treated as a means for something alien—or alienating.

Saying this, am I not trying to avoid a freezing objectification and conceptualization of truth by falling into the opposite extreme of making truth a sheer subjectivistic notion? It would seem so if the preceding paragraph were understood as coming from individualistic premises. But truth is never my truth. Truth is always a relation in which the subject is involved, but of which the subject is not the boss. Truth makes us free from the dominion of the one or the other, the object or the subject. Truth is an objective and subjective *agreement* (where the Sanskrit *gūrtas* [gūrtih] and the Latin *gratus* open up a world of *grace* and *celebration*).

Truth is not to be identified with mathematical precision, modern physical exactness, or technological efficiency. Within a given field, precision, exactness, and efficiency can be expressed according to accepted higher norms—Gödel, Heisenberg, and social analysts notwithstanding. On the other hand, truth has no higher criterion than truth itself. The criterion of truth has to be a true criterion. The criterion for truth belongs to truth itself.

Truth is not objectifiable either. We cannot speak of truth drawing its meaning on a blackboard. When the scholastics, for instance, defended the proposition that truth lies in the statement, they were defending it in a nonnominalistic world. Statements were more than simple algebraic equations. The direct link to things was not broken. Statements were ontologically laden and not merely nominal sentences. "Each thing refers to each being in the same way that it refers to its truth" is the way we could render Aristotle's intriguing words: *ἐκαστον ὡς ἔχει τοῦ εἶναι οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας* (*Metaphysics* II.1 [993 b 30]). "*Quae sunt maxime vera sunt maxime entia*" (the more a thing is true, the more it is [being]) (*ἀληθείας*), explains Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* I, q.2, a.3).

Truth as the identity of a thing with itself belongs, as the *Mahābhārata* says, to the highest mystery of a thing: its uniqueness. Truth is not a doctrine. A doctrine may be true or false according to the internal parameters explicitly or implicitly recognized by the text and context of the doctrine itself. If it is formulated in sentences, by this very fact it utilizes and thus recognizes the principles of identity and noncontradiction. If it refers to a particular field of knowledge, it recognizes the laws or structures governing that field, and the like.

In dialogue with Larson, I would venture the Vedantic notion of *svayampṛakāśa* as a description of truth, which is, incidentally, how Origen describes Christ, as *αὐτοαλήθεια*. "*Lumen . . . nihil est aliud quam quaedam manifestatio veritatis*," Aquinas wrote (*Summa theologiae* II, q.106, a.1). Aquinas did not know Shankara, but he had read Paul (Eph 5:13).

Larson is right in detecting the importance of the question of pluralism. Pluralism is an ultimate attitude and thus it is not "self defeating as any formulation of relativism" (which is not to be equated with relativity), but certainly self-referential, relativistically self-referential, like all ultimate issues are: being is being, A is A, reason is reasonable, evidence is self-proving, and so on. Here lies its importance, enlarging and deepening the principles on which human coexistence may thrive.

I have now to react to a double question. Is there a place for error? What is the criterion for falsehood?

The first question is common to pluralistic and nonpluralistic attitudes. There is certainly a place for error. When self-identity is denied, stifled, deformed, broken, whether existentially or in its manifestation or formulation, there is error. Many religions and philosophical traditions have related error and sin, *avidyā* and bondage, ignorance and damnation, and so on. We have already mentioned that *anṛta*, the absence of *ṛta* (order, cosmic harmony), is one of the Sanskrit words for error. Human freedom would have but little meaning without this capacity of forgoing one's own way and the possibility of failing to do so. I agree that "there can be no privileged [pluralist] position." Any position is a concrete stance standing somewhere and saying some particular thing that in no way has an exceptional status. Within

our system of thought, culture, religion, and philosophy, we have definite convictions that allow us to brand something as error or evil. Pluralism is not blind to error or evil, but does not absolutize any position.

The second question, regarding the criteria for discriminating truth from falsehood, is where the pluralistic attitude takes a relativistic stance against other positions that accept some kind of absolute norms or criteria.

In order to be brief, I take two examples, one logical and the other ethical.

Is the principle of noncontradiction not an absolute criterion for truth? Without indulging in logical subtleties, I shall say only this much: noncontradiction is only a negative, and not a positive criterion. Anything that goes against the principle of noncontradiction cannot be correct, but truth is not measured by this principle. "Christopher Columbus did not sail to what we now call America" is not true and not contradictory. The corpuscle and wave theories of matter are contradictory (qua hypotheses) and yet they fulfill on an equal (though imperfect) basis the condition of physico-mathematical adequacy. But we cannot limit the case to such "truisms." As the very name of the principle indicates, it is a principle of noncontradiction, that is, of diction, of idiom, of language. We mean language as meaningful language, as utterance that says something about reality. A saying and its *contra-dictory* cannot be said in truth. We grant the validity of this principle where it belongs: language. But from language to reality there is a jump. Relativity still holds. Here it is the relativity of language. In a word, we have negative truth-criteria for language (the non-*contra-dictory*), but not for Being. Christian thinkers (Peter Damian being often quoted), in order to overcome the view of an automatic universe and unfree God, have discussed whether God, by his absolute power (*de potentia Dei absoluta*), could bring about that the fall of Rome had never taken place and even that this world and the whole of creation had never existed. These were not futile speculations but serious metaphysical reflections on the nature of freedom and the problem of pluralism, that is, the nonabsoluteness of the mind. An absolutely free God, unless we make "him" prisoner of his own intellect, is not bound to obey any law (even of thinking) above "himself." But all this belongs to another cultural world to Larson's.

We have also ethical criteria, but they are not absolute. Each culture segregates its own criteria—and discusses them, often hotly. Let us recall the present debates about divorce, abortion, the death penalty, war, capitalism, and the like.

I, for one, unambiguously condemn the dropping of atomic bombs, the Nazi Holocaust, and the hunting of Africans to bring them as slaves to America, but I meet many people whom I respect who defend similar practices as a lesser evil (Kurdistan, Rwanda, the Persian Gulf, etc.). I cannot condone slavery as an institution, and yet we have to acknowledge that for centuries "good people," including politicians, thinkers, and saints, practically approved of slavery and defended the existence of outcasts. Cannibalism and human sacrifice may be other extreme cases. The condemnation of these examples belongs today to the common myth of our humanness. But not too long ago, people whom we would call humans and even humane practiced those horrendous acts. In our times, I would include war as an example of an institution that has not (yet?) found a common mythical rejection.

At a certain moment in space and time we may share some common myth that allows for some common criteria. We all, I suppose, condemn Nazism and Stalinism. But we, too, live in diachronical times. I have already mentioned the controversial issues of war and capitalism. We have to take cognizance of the fact that our human criteria do not coalesce. I shall not abandon my criteria, and according to them I shall struggle against what I consider harmful, inhuman, wrong, and evil. But I shall not extrapolate and absolutize my criteria. The theory of *svadharma*, besides possible and actual abuses, could be a hint of pluralism.

The difficulty arises when we cross cultural boundaries and have to work out the criteria that will allow the making of judgments, without imposing our ethical notions on others. I underscore in this dialectical reaction my respect and admiration for Gerald Larson, of whose friendship I am proud. *Sed amicus mihi Plato*. . . .

"Pluralism" certainly acknowledges "the status quo of global social reality in the latter decades of the twentieth century," although a pluralistic attitude is less prone to be guided by newspapers and other modern mass media concerning the situation of humanity. It is precisely "pluralism" that allows the struggle to transform the status quo without the spirit of crusade inherent in the recognition of a single New World Order. Without a pluralistic attitude we have either submission or violent rebellion. "The criticism of pluralism is the beginning of all criticism for our time," and it is precisely pluralism that allows a serene and nonfanatical critique because it does not absolutize any system.

The pluralistic attitude regarding ultimate human matters does not fall into the trap of treating human beings like peanuts. The purely objective treatment of human realities as "set[s] of things we call religions" falls into the classificatory mania of mainly Western civilization. In spite of the great merits of Aristotle, Porphyry, and modern science, one thing at least cannot enter into the classification; humankind, the classifier qua classifier, cannot enter into the classification. And pluralism tries not to eliminate the classifier. This is why the most vital field of pluralism is religion, because it deals with the ultimate questions of humankind. I am saying that Larson's method is vitiated at the very outset. My notion of *pisteuma* could be helpful here.

"Polytheism" applied to pluralism allows for an interesting observation. But as I wrote elsewhere, the very name is misleading, for no polytheist would affirm that *what* the monotheists considers to be One is many. The *poli* does not have an homogeneous predicate (*Θεός, Theos*).

All is well with the status quo, and I myself have ventured another reading within the strictest logical parameters. Indeterminacy (following the argument) is not meaninglessness. What "is in principle impossible to determine" is only meaningless in an absolutistic self-referential rationalism. To say that "more than one exclusivistic claim . . . may be equally true" does not necessarily "violate the principle of the excluded middle" because in a pluralistic position the "trueness" cannot be handled as "equally true." Truth cannot be manipulated like peanuts; it is unique. Between univocity and equivocation there is analogy, and within analogy Western tradition has distinguished an analogy of attribution and another of proportionality.

At the end of the day, the issues are still debatable, provisional, not closed, and this is precisely the pluralism I defend.

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND PLURALISM

The Claim of Our Times

The Past Hundred Years

The Chicago Centenary of the World Parliament of Religions is not only a commemoration of the past, it is also a celebration of the present and a challenge for the future. The three times are all involved. We are at a crucial moment. During the past hundred years a giant step has been made, mainly by the academic community. Gone, by and large, are the days of distrust and exclusivism. We know and respect each other. We have to confess that the intellectual world has been doing pioneering work.

But the world externally (politically, economically, socially . . .) has not improved much. Religious institutions are still lagging behind the challenges of our time. Religious warfare and violence are rampant all over the world. We could give examples in the five continents.

Could it be that the religious "parliaments" have been only that: parliaments and not actions? Could it be that the lack of action is due to a lack of contemplation? This should be a warning to us. Perhaps religions themselves need conversion, *metanoia*.

Could it be that we treat religions as mere sociological constructs and have developed a nonreligious notion of religion? Influenced perhaps by scientific ideology, or by the political arenas, have we not forgotten that religions are more—not less—than sets of doctrines or gatherings of peoples? Or that we see only the good side of religion and are blind to its shadows?

Is it a lack of the mystical dimension? Perhaps we should fall prostrate on the ground, remain silent—and get up only to go out to the streets and places of the world once filled with the power of the Spirit.

This is not a preamble, but the core of my discourse.

A parliament of religions, truthful to its name, should be a parliament, that is, a *parable* of religions: a "putting side by side" (*paraballein*) the different religions of the world, not as in a supermarket for sale, but as in an agora, an assembly for mutual knowledge, stimulation, enrichment up to a possible reciprocal fecundation, and action flowing from the new insights. We should come out with a new and authentic parable.

When the religious traditions of humankind began to come into more intimate and wider contact than merely through skirmishes on the battlefields or in casual encounters, a new situation began to develop: the religion of our neighbor, who lives no longer beyond the mountains or overseas but just around the corner or in the next house, begins to present an unavoidable question both for dealing with the neighbor and for dealing with my own religion, too. We can hardly avoid comparing, judging, and eventually deciding.

I detect three types of reactions. I would contest all of them.

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The Aggressive Attitude

Our religion is better, superior, ultimately the only one way of living a truly human life leading to perfection and "salvation." The brutal word today is *exclusivism*.

But there is another milder word. It is *evolutionism*. The other religions are not exactly wrong, but they are religions "on the way to development" as the self-appointed "First World" still officially calls the other two-thirds of humanity. The other religions would then be not altogether false, but on their way to reaching "our" stage of development. We stand at the head of a linear evolution, of the *Pithecanthropus erectus* up to our own.

Theologians will explain it, obviously, with a fascinating array of words: We are all realized souls, but we (or rather the others) don't know it; we all belong to the invisible *umma*, church (although only we, unlike the others, of course, know the visible one); we are all the same; the masses quarrel over trifles, but we belong to the few who know it; there is one God for all, but it goes without saying that ours is the best conception of that God; we are all sinners, but only we know how to repent.

Western Christianity, that magnificent blend of European spirit and Hebrew inspiration, offers a masterpiece example of this "fulfillment theology."

The Regressive Attitude

All religions are just operating on some archaic levels of consciousness, and they express themselves in diverse languages and universes of discourse. Divergences are accidental, and ultimately the very core is also an illusion. Religion is vitally and virtually obsolete. The brutal word is *indifferentism*.

The milder word is *tolerance*. We tolerate religions because they are neither powerful nor important enough to upset our accepted or imposed status quo. In the last analysis, the religion of my neighbor is not threatening because my own religion is not challenging either. Religion becomes secondary and sinks into private devotion without any relevance for at least public life. "Parliament of Religions"? Let them talk! Probably the participants have nothing better to do. Meanwhile we run the world on other lines. Another healthy warning for some. We can all agree to disagree because ultimately it does not matter.

The Progressive Attitude

We have learned by now that there is no absolute truth, that truth is scattered on all sides and in all religions so that we pick up our own brand, make up our minds, decide our choices, and produce an eclectic mix that satisfies our needs and allows us to be respectful of others and feel somewhat superior to those fundamentalists of all sorts and indifferences of all types—of the two previous attitudes.

Some people may call this third reaction the "pluralistic" religion needed for a "pluralistic" culture like ours. Not without reason this parliament has put the problem of pluralism as the first item of the "major presentations."

Nobody has the monopoly on words, but for the same reason one is free to use them, provided one describes sufficiently the meaning ascribed to them.

I submit that the word *pluralism*, as I have been using it for over a quarter of a century, is susceptible of denoting and connoting another semantic field different from the exclusivistic, the indifferent, and the eclectic.

I shall maintain that there is no pluralistic religion, but that there is a pluralistic attitude toward religions. The question touches the very foundations of our dominant culture and

brings us to the brink of the indispensable mutation of our times. The very meaning of religion is here put into question. Religions cannot "save" the individual by extricating the individual from humanity. They cannot "save" humanity by severing human beings from the earth.

But before elaborating on this, I should clarify a couple of points.

Role and Danger of Labels

I have criticized eclecticism, understood as a cocktail of bits and pieces of different religions. But the alternative is neither stagnant immovability nor what I would call the tyranny of labels.

To put names to things and events is a human prerogative. But naming means much more than putting labels on things. This latter activity belongs to a secondary role of the mind: the calculus. This quantification has gained the upper hand in some cultures and has led to what I have called classificatory mania, of which modern science offers us the supreme example. If you detect a different atomic weight in an atom that should be of hydrogen because it occupies its place in the periodic table of elements (of Mendeleev), you will give it another name and call it a hydrogen isotope and clearly distinguish deuterium from hydrogen. We put a label on a particular acid, write H_2SO_4 , and call it sulfuric acid. If we find a somewhat similar but weaker acid, because it has an atom less of oxygen (H_2SO_3), we call it sulfurous acid. Labels are univocal. They have only a single referent.

Names have a much larger flexibility. They are polysemic. A certain way of life and set of beliefs of a group of Jews and Greeks at Antioch some two thousand years ago was named Christianity. What we call today by the same name has enormously increased in atomic and even molecular weight, but we go on calling it by the same name. Sometimes we put on them different sublabels like Roman, Greek, Protestant, and Anglican, but we cannot put individual labels on all Christians. The classification would fail its purpose. Christianity denotes only a certain family resemblance, but this likeness is today no longer univocal. Often the similarities cross family lines: there may be more likeness between a Protestant and a Catholic activist than between a Roman Catholic fundamentalist and a liberal one.

Labels themselves need to be changed today. The very label "religion" needs transformation. Our present-day categories are becoming more and more obsolete.

The Present Situation

How far can words stretch their meaning? Or, to come to our question, how far can we keep our religious identity and be open to a pluralistic attitude? In order to be pluralistic, do we have to renounce our religious affiliations, our particular beliefs, and endorse only a general religiosity common to all traditions? This is our problem: *pluralism and religious identity*.

This question is neither rhetorical nor merely academic. It is of vital importance, especially today. Religious identity has direct repercussions for ethnic, political, and national identity. The black American in the United States, the happenings in Northern Ireland, in the Balkan Peninsula, and in India are all burning examples that religious identity cannot be treated lightly and irresponsibly. Do religions accept that the world needs 30 million soldiers and employs 60 percent of its resources for war? Can religion be blind to the fact that 20 percent of humanity consumes, manages, and "enjoys" 85 percent of all sources of energy? That a country like Thailand can subsist thanks to prostitution and Colombia and Bolivia mainly to the cultivation of drugs? When the world is burning, how can religions bypass such issues? The present-day problem is an ultimate question of life and death. Is this not a religious issue?

Pluralism

Some Definitions

In the context of our problem we could understand *tradition* as that which provides the background for our cultural identity, and *religion* as that which offers our own ultimate identity. This is possible only within a tradition. Tradition and religion are not synonymous, but they are intimately connected. The ultimate contents of a tradition are formed by its religious core. Religion gives each culture its ultimate content, and culture each religion its language—without specifying further at this time.

Pluralism, as I have elaborated time and again, is the utmost effort to deal with diversity without abandoning rationality. It is the outcome of the realistic and mature reaction of the intellect, which, after having assimilated the cumulative human experience of the last six to eight thousand years, comes to the insight that the empirical multiplicity of things can neither be reduced to intellectual unity nor left alone in an unrelated plurality: *diversitas splendor*.

Indeed, the apparent multiplicity of entities is reduced to intelligible unity in the concept or the idea. It is the problem of universals. But, unless we put all the ontic weight on the idea, relegating things to mere appearances—that is, unless we subscribe to a radical monism—we have to acknowledge that the concept or formal structure of a thing is a mental abstraction that has left a portion of reality out of the picture. Whatever degree of reality the idea may have, it is not the entire reality. There are many green things, but the color green is a mere concept that is not exhausted in a single green thing. Or, to avoid unnecessary problems for ourselves, we may put forth the second-degree example of the many colors. Color is only an abstraction, a generalization, a common denominator or a common character to all colors.

We cannot combine all colors in one supercolor. We recognize colors and we may have a concept of color, but color does not exist. There is only the concept of color. Some would say that color denotes the essence of color, but this alleged essence of color, realized as it may be in green or blue, is still not identical to green or blue.

There may be an essence of religion. I doubt it, for other reasons, but we may assume it for the sake of argument. Yet Islam is not identical with the essence of religion. Islam is a particular way of realizing this essence that is different from the way in which Taoism "realizes" this allegedly same essence. The rites, doctrines, and moods of these two religions are different, mutually incompatible. The mere concept of religion does not cover all that Islam or Taoism is.

Pluralism between Monism and Dualism

I make three statements.

Pluralism Is Not Sheer Plurality

This is a fact. There are many colors. They are irreducible to each other. If we want to embrace them together, we cannot do it in an intelligible way without reducing colors to color. The notion of color is an abstraction, a formal concept, a universal, but not identical to the thing. The real thing is a concrete particular color.

There are also many religions. "Let a thousand flowers bloom!" This is not pluralism. Religions are not like flowers, because some religions claim to occupy the entire earth, making impossible the blossoming of other religions; they want to grow in such a way as to choke out all the other neighboring flowers. Religions are not like flowers either, because

some doctrinal or moral contents of religion may appear not just as different as a rose and a tulip, but contradictory as a flower and a nonflower. Pluralism emerges when multiplicity becomes an intellectual and an existential problem, when contradiction becomes acute or coexistence seems impossible.

Plurality refers to objects; it is the multiplicity of objects that we perceive in one way or another. It is normally a quantifiable concept. It belongs to objectivity.

Pluralism, on the contrary, is not primarily objective. It does not say anything directly about objects. Certainly it is based on the perception of plurality, but it includes also a subjective attitude. It bounces back to the knowing subject and discovers the inherent limitations of the very process of intelligibility. Pluralism rebounds on the subject, as it were, once the subject has struck a radical incomprehensibility, once we face mutually incompatible statements that defy any dialectical *Aufhebung*. Instead of getting stuck in the objective impasse, we examine whether the cause may not lie on our side, on the side of the knowing subject, ultimately in the very act of knowing and the nature of knowledge itself. Nothing warrants that knowledge is the ultimate criterion of all reality, except that we do not have any other. Knowledge is the ultimate criterion of truth by the very definition of truth as appertaining to the knowing act. But our criteria purport to be criteria of reality and not only of intelligibility. Now, without jumping outside rationality, we can be aware that this rationality is limited by its own assumption, namely that knowledge is the criterion of the real. But this does not guarantee that the field of the real is identical with the intelligible—that the sphere of Being coalesces with that of Thinking.

Pluralism Is Irreducible to Unity—Even of a Higher Order

The many colors of our empirical world are subsumed into an abstract idea of color that belongs to a higher degree of abstraction and thus to a lower degree of reality. Pluralism is not structuralism or formalism of any kind. Indeed, if we speak of religions in the plural, it is because the singular has a certain meaning. But this meaning can be only formal. What entitles us to put Confucianism and Judaism under the same concept? Or even Marxism and scientism? Multiplicity is only of homogeneous entities like colors. We speak of pluralism when plurality is not reducible to an intelligible multiplicity, that is, when there is something that defies classification into a set of units—something different from mere unity and something different from multiplicity. Pluralism does not amount to saying that there are “many colors,” because the “many” has meaning only if we know what color is. Pluralism does not amount to saying that there is color, because this “one” color does not exist. Pluralism is a realistic attitude that, having realized the irreducibility to unity, tries to embrace the whole without reducing it to the quantifiable sum total of its parts or to a formal unity of whatever type.

Pluralism Stands Between Unity and Plurality

Pluralism stands between unity and plurality—without dialectically oscillating between them. Dialectics is a genial effort at not abandoning rationalism. It is the momentous outcome of Hegel in modern times, be it of the idealistic or materialistic type. Pluralism, on the other hand, abandons rationalism, but not rationality. It overcomes rationalism without abdicating in favor of irrationalism. It is the rational effort that leads us to discover intellectually the very limits of reason, because of the factual impossibility of reducing everything to unity (i.e., to intelligibility) without, for that matter, falling into the opposite extreme of chaotic irrationality.

Pluralism differs from the pragmatic *epoché*, the suspension of judgment waiting for an eschatological solution, postponing rational decisions until the end of time or to an indefinite future. If we have to maintain rationality in human behavior, decisions cannot be indefinitely postponed. God does not play dice, said Einstein. But God may play with more than one set of rules, which gives us the impression of sheer randomness. Pluralism maintains rationality.

Therefore, pluralism is not a super-system. Nobody can follow a supposedly pluralistic system without infringing upon rationality and the principle of noncontradiction. I cannot adhere to a belief system in which God both creates and does not create the world. In fact, such a system (*système*) does not exist. Pluralism is an attitude that emerges when we acknowledge the limits of reason and do not identify them with the limits of Being—when we do not equate Thinking and Being, to speak against Parmenides, or assume a priori the total intelligibility of reality. In other words, the conviction of pluralism dawns upon the human mind when we discover our own contingency, our own intellectual limitations, and do not compensate our impotence by projecting our frustration onto an infinite Mind that will reassure us that our ignorance is only ours—and for the time being. The existence of an infinite mind is not called into question here. What is called into question is the identification of this infinite mind with the entire reality. An omniscient mind will know all that is knowable, but all that is knowable does not need to be all that *is*, unless we gratuitously postulate the total intelligibility of reality.

After the triple failure witnessed by over six thousand years of human experience, we may be prone to consider the rationality and plausibility of the pluralistic attitude. These are the failures:

The historico-political failure of creating peace on earth should make us think very seriously whether the Parmenidian scheme, with all its variations, is the only paradigm of rationality. The philosophico-dialectical failure of reducing, into a single scheme of intelligibility, incompatible worldviews and philosophies cannot be easily whisked away by saying that we are smarter than all our predecessors and shall now overcome all the aporias—with a “universal theology (or philosophy) of religion.” The religio-cultural failure of humanity should equally prevent us from falling into the uncritical naïveté that our Parliament of Religions, or any other one, will reduce all religions to a single religion—in which we shall live happily hereafter. Pluralism dawns when we experience the relativity (not relativism) of all our concepts, insights, and convictions and of our human condition as such.

The pluralistic attitude is the fruit of a long genesis. We recognize mutually incompatible styles of life and contradictory doctrines. We are at the same time convinced of the goodness of our own lifestyle and the truth of our doctrines. And yet the different positions are mutually irreducible, and being ultimate, we cannot accept a dialectical *Aufhebung*. It all boils down to confessing that we sincerely believe that the other is wrong, and even sometimes evil, although we may have to tolerate the other. All efforts at unity have failed, and this failure has lasted for thousands of years. It is high time that we cease to cherish the idea that we are going to succeed in the “war that shall end all wars.”

The pluralistic attitude simply takes away the sting of absolutism on both sides, precisely because we have experienced that we are limited and not absolute. We shall try by all legitimate means to overpower or convince the other, but because we are not absolute bearers of absolute values (on either side), there is still room for a possible, common field, a common arena where we may encounter ourselves if we insist and persist in finding one. In short, we shall never “break relations”—even if this be only from the part of the pluralist.

Pluralists do not give up personal convictions. They simply do not absolutize them. There is not only the benefit of the doubt. There is also the credit of the other. Even those

who claim to speak in the Name of God cannot avoid speaking in their own name and in their own tongue. The *ab-solutus* would literally be invisible, inaudible, unspeakable, *solutus* from everything.

Pluralism amounts to the critical acknowledgment of the human condition, and religious pluralism to the confession that we are not the Absolute.

Pluralism does not necessarily affirm that there are many true religions. This may be what Christians fear, burdened as they are with the old idea of having the only true religion. Pluralism does not affirm that there are many truths—which is a contradiction in terms. Truth is itself pluralistic, not plural; that is, it is related to the context from which it comes and to the people for whom it is (appears, is revealed as) truth.

Pluralism simply acknowledges that there are belief systems, worldviews, philosophies, or religions that are mutually incommensurable. It encourages, further, the establishment of bilateral pacts—dialogue between two such systems so that in the dialogue itself we may work out the procedure and the contents of the encounter.

This is more than the discovery of the other. The other is all too often the “other” version of the self, its complement, even its critique, but ultimately its creation. The “other” is all too easily assimilated into our own parameters of understanding. The other of pluralism is not our *other* but another “self,” irreducible to our self, and to the “other” of our selfsame self.

Is there any type of possible relationship outside that of the other? Yes. This is the *thou*, which only love discovers: a *thou* that demands reciprocity. The dialogue leads to the discovery of the *thou* that appears when my self submits to being questioned by another self. The *thou* is neither the self nor the nonself.

Religious Identity

The Question

Our original question was this: Can we keep our religious identity and maintain a pluralistic attitude? Are we not betraying or at least diluting our respective religious traditions if we subscribe to pluralism? We are not questioning whether we all should be tolerant, receptive, sympathetic, and even open to other religions. We take this for granted. We are asking whether such tolerance, sympathy, and openness do not have their foundation precisely in pluralism. Otherwise, there is the danger that our tolerance is only a move to neutralize the other, our sympathy a show to hide our disapproval, our openness a strategy to profit from the relationship and so bring the “miscarried” to our fold.

My thesis should be clear by now. The historical step of this Parliament of Religions could be the endorsement, obviously pluralistic, of religious pluralism. By doing this we do not pass objective judgment on religions; we pass judgment on ourselves and our way of dealing with other religions.

After so many millennia of human historical experience we should be prepared to question whether the old religious paradigms are sufficient. They may still be necessary, but perhaps no longer sufficient. In the last hundred years, and in the minds and hearts of many enlightened people for thousands of years, humanity has become painfully aware that without religious peace, wholehearted tolerance, mutual religious respect, and sincere openness to the other, we cannot survive as a human race, nor can the individual lead a truly human existence. I submit that, without this acknowledgment of pluralism, all those beautiful ideals are stripped of their foundation and become only manipulable pseudo-values in the hands of the powerful. Pluralism offers the intellectual basis for such attitudes.

There is but one snag: Do we not betray our religious beliefs? Is not the price to be paid for pluralism a betrayal of the very core of each religion, as I have already hinted? Would not the remedy be worse than the malady? Should we not rather content ourselves with a pragmatic liberal laissez-faire, and expect enough common sense so as to opt for the lesser evil? Pluralism lies at the heart of an excruciating moral question: Why shouldn't we start a crusade if (we believe that) the other is evil? The rights of God stand above the rights of human beings. The *dharma* does not accept a compromise with *adharma*. Truth cannot yield to untruth. Is pluralism not going to undermine our zeal for justice and truth? Where do we stand if we abandon all our convictions?

I shall let the religious answer be preceded by a philosophical commentary.

Personal Identity

What is the meaning of religious identity? We shall not linger now on the debated questions of whether there is a permanent self, or whether the personal identity is just a question of our body, our memory, or touch upon the vexed problem of the substance along with the aporias of change and permanence. I shall make only two observations concerning the very nature of our human thinking.

The first says simply this. It is in the very nature of our human intellect to seek to reduce everything to unity. In fact, to understand amounts to succeeding in bringing a multiplicity of data (of whatever sort) into a unity. It is the famous *reductio ad unum*. Then and only then we do not proceed further and our mind rests. In other words, the problem of pluralism appears only to the intellect. The senses present no difficulty whatsoever in perceiving the irreducible colors. Only when we want to understand them do we need to know what is color, and not just see the green alongside the violet. We can accept many colors without any major obstacle. But can we accept many religions with divergent and incompatible truth claims? The obstacle is in our thinking. But we cannot and should not renounce thinking.

We should not renounce thinking indeed, but we should neither cripple thinking by reducing it to mere calculus. Truth is more than mathematical exactness. Truth is an awareness of reality and, as such, it includes also beauty—necessary distinctions (but not separations) notwithstanding. Bonaventure, echoing Augustine, defines beauty as a rhythmical or melodious equilibrium (*"pulchritudo nihil aliud est quam aequalitas numerosa"*), adding that in beauty this metrical evenness equality acquires its proper unity (*"ibi autem sunt rationes numerosae ad unum reductae"* [*Hexaemeron* VI.7]). Even mathematicians acknowledge that "one" is not a number, and philosophers know that thinking discovers beauty as much as truth and goodness.

My personal identity is not the intelligible unity of the plural elements or factors constitutive of my being, but rather the awareness of the belonging together of those elements or factors.

The second commentary refers to the different use of the principles of identity and noncontradiction in different cultures. I use the example of the Semitic and the Indic minds.

The Semitic mind thinks of identity by exclusion, that is, by applying in the first place the principle of noncontradiction. A religion is such when it differentiates itself from another one: "you are a Christian" amounts therefore to "you are not a Hindū"—which takes for granted, of course, that a Hindū is a non-Christian. The Christian identity affirms itself over against the background of not being a Hindū. The best a Muslim can say about God, blessed be he, is that he is not like human beings. A believing Jew may respect but will not participate in Hindū idol worship. He is a Jew, not a *goy* (pagan).

The Indic mind, on the contrary, thinks of identity in terms of inclusion; it applies in the first place the principle of identity. A religion is such when it identifies itself with the concept of religion. I am a Hindū when I am a Hindū, and I am all the more a Hindū the more I am identified with Hinduism as religion, as pure religion—accepting for the sake of argument that Hinduism is religion or even only a religion. As a Hindū I will not feel any scruple in receiving the Christian sacraments, although I know they belong to another religion. I will not suspect that I am betraying my Hinduism when I indulge in what is most horrendous for the occidental Christian mind: the so-called *communicatio in sacris*, participation in the rituals of another religion. When Pope John Paul II went to India, thousands of Hindūs went devotedly to receive Holy Communion. A Hindū will feel, in a certain way, that when she/he is a better Hindū she/he will also be a better Christian. The best a *vedantin* will say about brahman is that it is so totally identical to Itself that there is no place to differentiate Itself from anything—and certainly not from me. The only authentically true statement of the I, of the true I, is *aham-brahman*. To be a Hindū and at the same time a non-Hindū would be a contradiction, but not to be a Christian. Different ways of thinking!

In both cases, however, if I believe in a set of tenets, I cannot believe in the same way and at the same time in a contradictory set of beliefs. But my religious identity is not to be confused with the set of beliefs I adhere to. Faith is not identical to belief, nor religion to a set of doctrines. A nineteenth-century Protestant did not share the same beliefs as a Catholic. Yet they were both Christians and even mutually accused themselves of being heretics.

These reflections lead us to affirm that our identity is inseparable from the way we think of our identity, although we may make the distinction between our identity and our interpretation of it. We need to underscore this point lest we forget our own modern individualistic myth. The personal identity of many people is by far not synonymous with the awareness of one's gross body. "Cuius regio eius religio," the famous phrase sounding so ignominious to modern ears, could furnish us with an important historical example. My identity, what I am, does not need to be just the physical body that my senses and my memory witness as being mine. My identity as a Jew or as a Pole, a Calvinist or a Hindū cannot be put under one single criterion.

If my mother happens to be from a traditional Jewish community, even if she never put a foot in the synagogue, and I acknowledge my Jewish origins, I am a Jew. If my father belongs to a Hindū family, even if he does not believe in any specific tenets, and I do not disown my karma, I am a Hindū. If my parents were so-called unbelievers, but had me baptized and I do not disown that rite, I am a Christian. If I have taken refuge in the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*, I may be considered a Buddhist. If I, in spite of my origins, sincerely worship Allah and recognize Muhammad as his prophet with the *Qur'ān* as the revelation of God, I am a Muslim. If I belong to the Ibos and have not converted to another religion, generally Christianity or Islam (and even then I would not be so sure), I am an Ibo. And this would apply to most so-called tribal religions. I am saying this to make clear that we cannot apply any single criterion in order to determine the religious identity of a person.

How often have we not heard the reproach, generally from outsiders who profess to know better: "But then you are not a Christian" or "As a Muslim you cannot say this!" Who has the right to excommunicate the other?

I am ready to defend the thesis that if someone sincerely confesses to be a *Vaiṣṇava*, a Catholic, a Baha'i, or whatever, and as such is recognized by a community of the same confession, that person is what she affirms herself to be, although she may be considered a heretic by some other groups. Living religions are constantly in a *fluxus quo*. And we all know that often the despised heretics of yesterday are the recognized prophets of tomorrow.

Religious Belonging

Finally we come to grips with the concrete problem of whether we can apprehend simultaneously to several religious traditions. It is here that the different traits of what we have been trying to say should come together. In order to be brief I may recur reluctantly to an autobiographical example.

One of the most often quoted and misquoted sentences of mine dates from 1970. It sums up in a certain way over half a century of personal experience. After having spent at that time one-third of my life in India and the rest in the West, I wrote, "I left as a Christian, I found myself as a Hindū, and I return back as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."

It has been interpreted as if I were saying that I lost my Christian identity and instead got a threefold identity. My original paper should prove that I did not mean an eclectic mix of three religions or a doctrinal synthesis of a new religion. I have been insisting that we cannot have a pluralistic system, follow a multiplicity of philosophies, or belong to a plurality of religions. What we have is a personal religiousness that may have integrated, more or less harmoniously, the tenets of several religious traditions. This positive symbiosis does not make us a split personality. We all have a father and a mother, that is, different factors that shape our being. Orthodox Christology does not affirm that Christ is half God and half man, but fully divine and fully human in a personal union.

Leaving aside biology and theology, a metaphor from the neglected area of the geography of religions may be useful here. When the Yamunā and the Ganges meet, the Mississippi and the Paraná, and the Paraná and the Salado, why should we call the continuation of the rivers with a single name giving preference to the Ganges, the Mississippi, and the Paraná? Have the other rivers disappeared? Or is it only a question of power? The waters are indistinguishable and the identity is a new one. Is the Ganges after Allahabad less holy because her waters have been "polluted" by the Yamunā?

Indeed, when the little Assi (now practically disappearing) joins the majestic Mā Gangā (Ganges), the Assi is proud to have been received by the great river and enjoys the privilege of being also holy. After Vārāṇasī the Assi has become the Ganga, and the Ganga is also happy not to excommunicate the Assi, and carry her waters until the very shores of the wide ocean. Here comes again the question of labels. Just for competition regarding length we call one river Missouri/Mississippi. The Yamunā, and much more the invisible Saraswatī, are proud to be called Ganges, although who knows if one day the same river meandering through Patna, the Buddhist country, will be called the river of the bodhisattvas.

Each river, like each personal religion, is fed by the small rivulets of our personal biographies. In recent times, by and large, except for particular cases, the tributaries to our major religions have been small though many. But we should not forget the geography of the past. When the waters of the Germanic peoples joined the Latin Tiber, which had already received Greek and Hebrew water molecules, they became a new river, which we still call Christianity in spite of many hydraulic changes. Should we build, in our technocratic era, gigantic dams to prevent, or worse, to direct according to our strategies the fresh waters of the life-giving rivers of the world? A dam is eclecticism because the waters are not allowed to flow and are sluiced into an artificial agglomeration.

But there is still more. When meandering through a Christian territory I feel a Christian, but some who know other lands tend to call me a Hindū or a Buddhist. And vice versa: When my life flows in a Hindū milieu, some call me a "pukka" Hindū and others a "dangerous" Christian. To continue with our rivers and with our remark on labels, the same river flowing in one country is called the "son of Brahma," the Brahmaputra, and when it bestows its benefits

in another land it is called the "Yellow River," the Yaluzangbu Jiang. Have the Tibetans now lost their river? Is it all a question of power? What is the identity of the river?

I am singing basically a single melody in three tones. The first belongs to the heart, the second to the mind, and the third to the spirit.

The Heart

We are often shy and tend to demean the matters of the heart. I am saying that I did establish real, affectionate, and active fellowship with those three traditions, to which I have to add the secular community of my fellow citizens in the wide world struggling for justice and searching for truth, irrespective of "confessional" creeds. They are also my people. Anything that touches those communities strikes chords in me that do not weaken those of our common human heritage, and yet they are more particularly sensitive. Indeed, I feel also ashamed or exhilarated when my brothers and sisters at large have committed crimes or performed heroic acts. I feel ashamed of Nazism and the slave trade, but I will respect a deeper feeling than mine in a German and in a black American or an African. I am proud of Shakespeare and Ibsen, but Dante and John of the Cross came much closer to my heart. I admire the Qur'ān, but the Vedas speak to me more than the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels more than the Analects of Confucius, although I have more intellectual admiration for Lao Tzu than for St. James. Each of us is at home somewhere, and this home does not need to be the four walls of a chalet; yet it needs to be a home, a congenial environment of our own. "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia," was the famous phrase of Jose Ortega y Gasset. My religious identity is part of my human identity.

Religious identity is neither an automatic fact of birth—like that of being a member of a tribe, race, or nation—nor an ideological membership—like that of a club, political party, or association. While we don't choose our parents or tribe, and we do choose our club or party, we are somewhat chosen by the religion we accept to belong to. Acceptance, and free acceptance, is paramount here. I call it the feminine element. My religious identity comes as a sort of gift, a kind of grace that comes to me and that I am free to accept, reject, or modify. But I have not two loves when I love my father and my mother or bathe in my Hindū and my Christian waters.

"Le coeur à ses raisons . . . the heart has its reasons that reason does not know" (Pascal); "karmagatir vicitrā" (the course of karma is mysterious and difficult to discern; *Yoga-sūtra-bhāṣya* II.13).

The Mind

To profess one religion or to confess one's religious fellowship is not synonymous with just falling into sympathy with a certain group of people. It is a much more serious matter. It is also an affair of the mind, a question of intellectual honesty. It is an issue of belief, of an enlightened belief. I could not belong to a tradition that tells me to hate my enemy or that there is nothing more than what meets the eye. This means that the doctrines of a particular religion will have to appear believable to me. And if I have to do with more than one religious tradition, I will have to find a personal way of reconciling apparently irreconcilable doctrines. And here the pluralistic attitude is central.

A threefold task needs to be performed here.

1. The discovery of a *fundamental harmony*. We should dig down to the core of those traditions and find whether there are direct contradictions in their fundamental insights.

Satya, *karuṇā*, *agape*, and justice seem to me fundamental insights of those four traditions, all of which open up ways of overcoming selfishness and reaching "transcendence."

2. The search for human *polarities*. We should examine whether many apparently lethal tensions may be nothing but disguised or deformed divergences, which, well interpreted or reinterpreted, may be converted into enriching polarities or alternate modes of explaining perennial questions of the human mind.

Between an Upanishadic spirituality of interiority and a Christian service to one's neighbor there may be a very fruitful polarity and not an irreconcilable tension. If the belief in reincarnation does not degrade the dignity of the human person by converting her into a mere stepping-stone in a cosmic cycle, I do not see any difficulty in adopting the cosmological hypothesis behind so-called reincarnation in fair competition with the cosmology underlying heaven and purgatory from a common Christian viewpoint.

3. Coping with *irreconcilable doctrines*. We should keep irreconcilable teachings, without distorting them, as expressions of mutually incommensurable formulations of what I may call succinctly the Mystery. No doctrine gives an exhaustive explanation of any religious tenet. A Hindu *ātmavāda* and a Buddhist *ānatmavāda* are irreconcilable, and also incompatible are the metaphysical options of a Thomistic and a Scotistic Christian scholasticism. I may find either a *via media*, or a plausible reinterpretation, or I should simply let them subsist as valid options, provided I succeed in avoiding strict contradiction. The basic requisite for this third task is obviously to relativize the mutually incommensurable tenets without playing them down or diluting their contents and exigencies. This is not possible if strict rationalism is accepted as the ultimate yardstick of all reality. But it is not against reason to accept incompatibility, and to live with it, provided we do not allow the *diction* of the contradiction to percolate into the ontic level. The condition is that we recognize the distinction between the ontic and the ontological levels and that we do not absolutize the latter. In other words, there is a transcendence that transcends the two opposite irreconcilable statements. This allows for situating the doctrinally contradictory sentences onto different planes.

The coexistence between particle and wave theories in modern physics may give us a pale example of how to cope with such a situation. The example is pale because in our case we are concerned with something much more problematic than the obedience to our mathematical postulates and to the phenomena that appear to our measuring instruments. Between a theistic and an atheistic system, between *ātmavāda* and *ānatmavāda* there is incompatibility for our understanding (*quoad nos*), but we do not have here a referent like a mathematical postulate or an empirical observation (as in physics). We have instead an unreachable transcendence that we cannot say is exhaustively represented by any of the contradictory statements. We recognize instead the limits of our intellectual faculties. The circumference and the radius are mutually incommensurable, and yet they coexist and are mutually dependent. But there is more.

The Spirit

It is also a matter of the spirit and of the "spirit of the times." It belongs to the *kairos* of our contemporary culture to go a step beyond the religious apartheid of times past—justified as they might have been in a situation that was different from ours. I spoke earlier of mutation. Our religious identity is not reduced to belonging to institutions of the past.

Many a religious constituency is obsolete today. There are religious nationalisms and religious patriotisms that work against the central issue of all religions, which consists precisely in breaking all those bondages that prevent the fulfillment of every being in general and human beings in particular.

A pathetic example of the inadequacy of religious institutions to provide religious identity could be the life and doubts of Simone Weil, who died of physical exhaustion in 1943. She, the Jewish "unbeliever," was Roman Catholic at heart, but her mind did not allow her to follow her heart. Her spirit was more Catholic than that of many Roman Catholic theologians, but the spirit of the times was not ripe for harvesting such a splendid flower in any confessional field. By remaining in the no-man's-land of religious institutions, she broke through the walls of religious exclusivisms.

Now, in order to bring about the required transformation, we have to process step by step, and from the very heart of each tradition.

Let me be personal again. I understand and can also speak more than one language as my own. That is, I think from within the universe of each language without translating from another one. This applies of course to religions as languages. Using a Christian language I will so wholeheartedly confess that Christ is truth that I will reverse the sentence, like Gandhi did with God, and affirm that the truth is Christ. In both cases *truth* stands for ultimate truth, of course—and has little to do with exactness, precision, or accuracy. This Christ, identified with truth, is obviously not a sort of hidden Jesus lurking underneath Hinduism or elsewhere in order to "get Hindūs over," but simply truth.

Nobody has the monopoly on truth, nor do Christians have the monopoly on Christ. Christ is simply (at this level of discourse) the Christian symbol for truth, but it is neither the only label, nor does the word *Christ* reveal all the many other possible aspects of truth. Yet Christians cannot but use this name while confirming that they do not know the breadth, length, height, and depth of that mystery that surpasses all knowledge (Eph 3:18–19).

This is Christian language, but I can speak other languages that convey liberating power and saving grace—not only for their respective believers (which is obvious), but for me as well. I am not translating from Christianity, but speaking other languages, and I discover not that I am saying "the same" but that it is my selfsame same who sincerely expresses his convictions. It is a parallel language, and I understand both.

Reflecting on this fact, I submit religions to profound reinterpretations for which I am solely but conscientiously responsible. I am a Christian whom Christ has led to sit at the feet of the great masters of Hinduism and Buddhism and become also their disciple. It is my being a Hindū-Buddhist-Christian.

This allows me to declare myself a bona fide Christian and also a Hindū, a Buddhist, and a scholar. How I have done this is a life's commitment and not always an immediately successful one. Yet hope is also a religious virtue.

But this is not all. From the other end of the spectrum I perform similar steps. I am a Hindū whose karma has led him to encounter Christ and a Buddhist whose personal effort has led him to similar results regarding the two other traditions.

I could start here from my experience of the *sanātana dharma*, which allows me to discover this insight also within Christianity and Buddhism. Also, Shiva is a living symbol for me. I know by experience that the *lingam* of Arunṇācala is more than a stone or a mountain, that the *trika* is more than a dialectical device. But this very insight leads me to search for homeomorphic equivalents within Christianity and reinterpret these latter with Hindū categories. In short, I discover myself a Christian-Buddhist-Hindū. And I do something similar with Buddhism.

What, then, is my religion? Do I not belong simultaneously to the three? Or are they not rather harmoniously transformed in me? Are not all the waters of the Bhāgirathī, Alaknanda, Gomati, Yamunā, Ghaghra, Son, Assi, Varuṇa, all waters of the Ganges, once they reach a certain point? I could have said Negro, Japurā, Jurqā, Purus, Madeira, and Tapajós, all waters

of the Amazon. At a certain moment in life the river is only one, be it carrying waters from Wisconsin, Illinois, Des Moines, Missouri, Arkansas, Minnesota, or Mississippi.

What does it all mean? It means a triple fact: a historical newness, a metaphysical challenge, and a religious mutation.

The historical newness is patent. Religions were once upon a time identified with the tribe to which one belonged. Later their identity was centered on a doctrinal creed that was supposed to be the uniting force of religious institutions. Broadly speaking, this is what today we call religions. The coming historical period will put the emphasis on the experiential factor. Religions will be primarily identified by the set of faith experiences that will slowly find their appropriate doctrines and found their more adequate structures and institutions. Tradition is not sheer repetition of the past but a "handing over" (*traditio*) of accumulated experiences conveniently transformed. The polymorphic characters of Hinduism may give us an inkling of what I am saying.

The metaphysical challenge could be said to be another name for pluralism. The awareness of external, sociological, organizational, and other differences among religions leads us to renounce any type of exclusivism. The religious dimension of human beings, or religiousness, is more than a mere sociological construct. Religions have a mystical core.

The metaphysical challenge deabsolutizes all our ways of thinking and even of being. Religions do not need to follow already known and trodden ways. Reality, and authentic religiousness as well, as human parts of realization (salvation, liberation . . .) are radical novelties and not mere conclusions of the past. Our parliament is not a museum. It should be a crucible.

Religions are not immovable and artificial dams to contain water in order to produce power. Religions are flowing rivers nurtured by high glaciers of *ṛsis* and prophets, distinct sources from thinkers and past traditions enlivened by nearby clouds from contemporary history all coming from the heavens in order to bring life to the earth and to human beings.

The religious mutation is not the fruit of any violent revolution or attack from the outside, but the fruit of a growth from within each tradition so that the way is not through apostasy or abandonment, but through a higher fidelity to the unfathomable grace of the Spirit, which, as the Jewish Bible says, is "a silent Wind" (1 Kgs 19:12).

We are not only cocreators of our own lives. We are also cocreators of our religions. The future of humanity depends on this. The coming millennium will be a "new Name" brought about by a radical human *metanoia* or it will not be. The earth can wait. She will still be there. The human race cannot. Either a transformation takes place or we disappear from the face of the earth. As the *Katha-upanishad* says:

Asti nāsti: To exist or not to exist.

This is the question. And our responsibility.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The Metaphysical Challenge

To speak about pluralism is fashionable today. Political pluralism has almost become a democratic dogma. Yet few people seem to be aware of the radical revolution such a pluralistic worldview entails if we draw the ultimate consequences. It amounts to forsaking one of the intellectual pillars upon which many a civilization has based its cultural constructs for at least twenty-five centuries: the harmonious correlation between thinking and being. Truth has long been the traditional name for this correlation. In pluralism, thinking ceases to be the controller of being. The different religious traditions would instead be expressions of the creativity of being, striking out on ever new adventures into the Real. Reality is intelligible only partly, and a posteriori. Thinking alone really does not help us much to deal directly with Reality. We need, rather, a kind of cosmotheandric confidence that would put us in harmony with the Real without annihilating in us the power to be active participants in the life of Reality.

Because religions are the natural places for the unfolding of ultimate issues, it is but natural that this shift should emerge most clearly from a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach to the problem of religion and truth.

Religions offer the locus for ultimate truth and point the way to it. They may not speak about it, but a certain primordial apprehension of reality stands at the basis of each religion. When these fundamental insights are spelled out in a universe of discourse, we discover divergent conceptions of reality.

Many religious doctrines are certainly accidental to the main thrust of the religious quest, but some are fundamental. Delete the effective presence of the ancestors, and many American and African religions collapse. Suppress historical consciousness, and Christianity loses its bearings. Dismiss *karma*, and many an Asian religion is crippled.

In a word, there is a constitutive link between a certain experience of reality (which can be expressed intelligibly) and the religion that espouses it. It should be clear from the outset that we are dealing with the intellectual side of religion, which is mainly where the problem of religious pluralism arises. And it is in this respect that we speak of the problem of truth in religions.

The demands of rationality leave open the following major options:

1. Only one religion is true. All others are, at best, approximations.
2. Religions ultimately refer to the same Truth, although in different manners and expressions. Basically they are all the same.

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3. All religions are false because of the falsity of their claim. There is no such ultimate destiny.
4. Each religion is true to the extent it is "best" for its adherents. Truth here is highly subjective. *Religion ist Privatsache.*
5. Religions are the product of history, and thus both similar and different according to the historical factors that have shaped them.
6. Each religion has unique features and presents mutually incommensurable insights. Each explication of any basic experience has to be evaluated on its own merits and proper terrain, because the very nature of truth is pluralistic.

A case will be made here for the sixth option. But first we shall clarify our nomenclature; second, situate the other options; and, third, elucidate our hypothesis: the metaphysical challenge of religious pluralism.

Dramatis Personae

By *religion*, I mean the set of symbols, myths, and practices that people *believe* gives ultimate meaning to their lives. I stress the factor of believing, for religion is never just an objective set of values. Religion is always personal and necessarily includes the belief of the person.

Let us call *basic experience* (*Grunderfahrung*) or *primordial apprehension of reality* that mainly spontaneous and at first uncritical human attitude that will subsequently express itself in a set of more or less organically linked symbols, myths, and practices. This basic experience, which does not need to be self-conscious, lies at the origin of each particular religion and conditions its ulterior convictions regarding the nature of reality and the meaning of life.

Very often this basic experience is that of the founder of a religion, abetted by all the accretions of tradition. Sometimes it is just handed down from time immemorial and reinterpreted, again and again, within a certain mythical continuity. Each religious person more or less deeply assimilates this basic experience, and often re-creates it. Religious traditions play the major role in shaping this basic personal attitude. A typology of these basic experiences in space and time would offer a primary approach to the classical divisions of humankind's religions. It is the diversity and discrepancy of these primordial apprehensions, rendered visible through their intellectual expressions, that raise the problem of religious pluralism.

Let us understand by *truth* that quality or property of reality that allows things to enter into a *sui generis* relation with the (human) mind and that finds its main expression in language.

Truth may entail a correspondence between things and our thinking, or it may be a construction of our minds (or of a supreme mind), or both. At any rate, truth implies a certain correlation between our faculties of apprehension and what they apprehend.

In other words, the question of truth is a question of the intellect and for the intellect. The truth of religion is not in its symbols, myths, and practices but in their intellectual content—which amounts to saying in their interpretation. We have to make do here with the interpretations given to the basic experiences underlying religions.

A *true religion* is an ambiguous phrase. Religions can be true or false only in as much as (a) they speak to our minds and (b) our minds reflect upon them. In this sense, a true religion has to satisfy these two conditions:

1. It has to deliver the promised (believed) goods to its members—that is, it needs to be truthful to its own tenets. This does not mean that *nirvāṇa* or the dwelling place of the

ancestors, for instance, has to be "somewhere," or that the person who commits a "mortal sin" goes to a physical place called "hell." It does mean, however, that those who keep the Commandments, follow the *dharma* or observe the Four Noble Truths will fulfill their lives—all the many possible cosmological and anthropological interpretations of these tenets notwithstanding.

In a word, a true religion is one that serves its purposes for those who believe in it. We could call this its existential truth or honest consistency.

2. It has also to present a view of reality in which the basic experience(s) is (are) expressed in an intelligible corpus that can sustain intelligent criticism from the outside without falling into substantial contradiction. This does not mean, for example, that God has to exist in the crude or literal way in which an outsider may imagine them. It does mean, however, that worldviews that accept the reality of said Gods can present themselves in the arena of human critique and meet questions put from the outside, so as to be able to present a picture that is consistent—if not convincing for everybody.

In a word, a true religion is one that gives good reason for itself in a universe of discourse. We could call this its essential truth or authentic coherence.

The plurality of religions implies no need to tackle the problem of religious truth. It simply acknowledges the fact that there are many religions. If they want to conduct crusades against each other, let them. But religious pluralism cannot bracket the question of truth. It has to take a stance among allegedly contradictory religious intellectual affirmations. Hence, the problem.

Pluralism is not a super-system. It accepts the fact that the human condition does not possess an all-encompassing view of reality.

We may draw parallels with linguistic, cultural, and philosophical pluralism.

These pluralisms do not defend a *lingua universalis*, a super-culture, or a metaphilosophy.

Linguistic pluralism does not assume that one existing language is more adequate to human intercourse than any other. It does not defend a priori that all human intuitions molded by one particular language are necessarily translatable into other linguistic, that is, human worlds. Each language is unique. Any translation has to search for an equivalent human experience within its own linguistic universe.

Cultural pluralism admits different forms of being a person within the horizons of different cultures and thus does not impose the priority of one culture over any other. The assumption, for instance, that modern technology is a universal value beneficial for everybody is clearly at loggerheads with cultural pluralism.

Philosophical pluralism recognizes different forms of philosophizing and, in the final analysis, has to admit the validity of mutually incompatible philosophies.

Only after the acceptance of these three pluralisms are we prepared to discuss and eventually to accept the legitimacy of religious pluralism. This latter, in fact, presupposes the other three. Religious pluralism acknowledges the authenticity, the validity, and the truth of different religions.

Religious pluralism would not present any greater difficulty here if it were not for the intellectual dimension of religion.

Symbols, myths, and practices have no claim to universality. They do not enter into conflict with their peers because they, unlike the universe of logical discourse, raise no claim to any other truth but their own authenticity. We shall then concentrate on this intellectual side of religion, precisely in order to situate the limits of the intellect and to discuss the challenge presented by religious pluralism.

By *metaphysics* I understand that human discipline that accepts the validity of both a human capacity for thinking the supra-empirical and the reality of such a dimension. We may also call it ontology, or simply the power of thinking Being. I am not assuming here any particular philosophical stance besides or beyond this.

The Inadequacy of Monistic Answers

We call *monistic* all those approaches to the problem of religious pluralism that have in common a monistic conception of truth. Truth is said to be one: either one for all or one for every single individual. A method is monistic if it recognizes only a single yardstick for measuring the merits or demerits of all religions—as if such a yardstick were recognized by all parties and were so neutral as to lie outside any religious tradition.

We shall now make a summary review of the above-mentioned hypotheses.

Only One Religion Is True

And that, obviously, is my religion. There is something very telling in such a conviction. We should not dismiss it lightly because of the danger of fanaticism it contains and the many factual abuses occasioned by such a belief. We are engaged in a theoretical or philosophical analysis and are not just reflecting on the sad experiences of history.

First of all, this is an extremely coherent and rational position. I believe myself to be in the truth. I see and hear that other people hold what I can only call wrong opinions. And I shall have to say so . . . "Amicus mihi Plato, sed magis arnica veritas" (Plato is my friend, but I love truth more than him). This does not mean that I am intolerant; rather, it can make me compassionate. It does not need to breed haughtiness. It may equally foster a sense of dignity and responsibility. Furthermore, precisely because I believe in the truth of my religion, I will discover my own religiousness wherever I find parcels of truth. This will spur me to interiorization, and also to converting people to the liberating Truth—as I see it.

And yet this position is unconvincing even on theoretical grounds. It assumes that if not I personally, at least the community of my religion has such access to universal truth as to have the right to exclude anybody who does not think or behave according to the lights that "we" received. Truth is only "my" truth or least "our" truth. Even assuming that an omniscient God has spoken to us, we cannot eliminate the all too human factor of our limited understanding, as well as the very freedom of the divine to perhaps speak to others—even if we understand that He has said that He would not do such a thing. He might have spoken once and been heard in different ways and at different times.

This attitude violates, moreover, the common human experience of the diversity of races, peoples, cultures, ways of thinking, and so on, and tends to reduce everything to manageable parameters. It is a closed position.

There is a more subtle variation of this same position. It affirms, "Some religions are true, and some (others) are false." We should again stress the positive rationale behind such a position. We may find degraded forms of religion. We would call them wrong or harmful, not only as regards accidentals, but in their most central tenets. Religions fostering hatred, racism, exploitation, dominance, and so on should be considered wrong religions. They could be called false insofar as they contradict the very thrust and accepted purpose of religion, that is, the salvation of the fullness of Man—in whatever sense we may understand this "salvation" or this "fullness." We shall come to this a little later, because we are not dealing here with the affirmation that there may be wrong religions, but with the statement that some religions are true and some others false.

This distinction is generally used for the purpose of distinguishing two groups of religions: our group, obviously the true one, and the "other" group of false religions. Some scholars, for instance, tend to accept that the so-called High Religions, sometimes also called Great Religions, form the group of true religions, while the so-called primitive religions, and sometimes animism and polytheism, form a group of false religions. Islam and Christianity in Africa are allied against so-called fetichisms and animisms of all sorts. Hindū India has a certain condescension toward so-called tribals, but at heart they are considered lower religions by many adherents of the "High Caste Religions."

But who decides on the criterion for such a judgment? All too often it is a political decision that eventually decks itself out in philosophical garb. Where are we to draw the line between true and false religions? We may fairly assume that religions we brand as false consider themselves to be true. The criterion with which one judges the truth or falsity of religion is intrinsic to that same religion. So we assume a priori a kind of universally accepted standard, which is either historically conditioned or merely formal. We may with some plausibility assume that the formal laws of noncontradiction and identity are universal as regards propositions . . . but religions deal with human life, which is not a purely rational endeavor. Man has reason, and so we agree to call the human being a rational animal, but Man is more than pure reason, and human life certainly much more than rationality. Pluralism elevates other dimensions of reality to the same rank as rationality.

All Religions Are Ultimately True

They all say the same thing at the ultimate level. This is a position opposite to the previous one. It also has its partial justification. It represents a quite understandable reaction against the intolerance, shortsightedness, and sheer ignorance of other people's religiousness. It argues in the following manner: "If we go deeply enough into our tradition we discover how far we are from the goal, how transcendent truth is, and how relative are all our ways of thinking, speaking and behaving. Truth is one, but, we, poor mortals, see it in many ways. And if we investigate all the religious traditions of humankind we shall discover the same patterns, the same thrust toward the infinite and, ultimately, the same ineffable (mystical) experience. Only with sympathy and understanding can we approach the vast field of ultimate human beliefs, and then we shall easily discover how alike they really are. Religions are different paths to the same and unique goal." It may be legitimate to defend a "transcendent unity of religions," but it should be made very clear that this unity is also transcendent to reason.

Such a position is weak in that it does not take sufficiently into account the indisputable fact that the paths themselves also belong to the goal. It seems to accept a Kantian "thing-in-itself," transcendent and aloof, which has nothing to do with the approaches and overtures we make to it. It wants to turn all of us into "mystics" and turn all the religions into what may perhaps be their quintessence, but which is certainly not their total nature. If we take religions seriously we have to listen to what they themselves say, and most of them zealously guard their identity by differentiation. They would not agree that they are just the same.

There is a nominalist attitude inherent in this option that runs directly contrary to many religious traditions. Names are sacred; words are not interchangeable. Not even languages are accidental. Human expressions cannot be isolated; they are more than just labels we put on things. Nominalism is a useful scientific tool, but it does not do justice to religious phenomena.

If religions do not *say* the same, then they *are* not the same. If we suppose that all religions are equal, in spite of the divergence of their doctrines, we are either minimizing the role of the intellect or we are situating religions on a supra-rational level outside the jurisdiction of rationality. In the first case, we are saying that it does not matter whether we affirm God

or not, *âtman* or not, the reality of the world, of evil, and so on. We are saying that rational discrepancies are unimportant. Ultimately, we despise reason, which only puts up barriers and raises rational questions. In the second case, we are in the uncomfortable position of defending the idea that the truth of religion is so esoteric and deep that there can be no public talk about the matter. We bar reason from the door, and in the same stroke bar the door to further rational inquiry.

All Religions Are Equally False

This is also an understandable reaction to the well-known facts of the various scandals that most traditional religions have generated during the course of human history. The inertia of tradition is sometimes so strong, the resistance to adaptation so weighty, and the religious hubris so patent that those who would carefully collect arguments in favor of this thesis would certainly not lack data. Yet the dark side of religious history is not all there is to it. If religions can be so bad and so good, it may very well be that they represent a crucial and deep-seated ingredient of human nature.

But again, on a theoretical basis this position seems to contradict itself, for the very statement about the falsity of all religious worldviews is a religious statement and thus also presumed to be false. If such a statement were true, it would express the viewpoint of a possible true religion, namely that set of symbols and practices that would eliminate all the "religious" abuses and superstitions.

A more refined formulation would maintain that all the religions are equally inadequate because they attempt to deliver injunctions and formulate ideas that are beyond the scope of any human intuition. The majority of religions would answer that they are well aware of this fact and do not presume such perfection.

The defenders of this position may claim that no religion delivers the liberation it promises and that no religious doctrine is without contradictions. To this it may be responded that for many people religion does seem to satisfy this ultimate ideal and does give them not only peace and solace but also that fullness in which they believe. Religions are human facts, and the fact remains that many insiders of so many religions seem to contest or simply not to see or mind the alleged doctrinal contradictions. In other words, they are not convinced of their falsehood. And in this sense, the contention that religions are false is based *solely* on the criteria of the "public prosecutor."

Further, as we have already hinted, this criticism of religion (inasmuch as it hits the target) purifies religion but does not destroy it. It may say that all these transcendent goals are nonexistent, and that there are no ultimate meanings in life. Yet this discourse is already a religious one, since it defends its own right to be what amounts to the true religion that will help us lead a purely this-worldly and empirical day-to-day life. On this assumption, the true religion would be that which finally performs what traditional religions aimed to fulfill in their mistaken directions.

Religion Is a Private Affair

Religions are so highly unique and personal that any comparison is out of the question. Each one is the best for its members. Truth, after all, is what suits me. A disincarnated truth is not a truth at all, but only an abstraction.

This position avoids many of the pitfalls of the previous ones. It takes religion seriously and people as well. It argues for respect and tolerance. It contains a healthy confidence in

the other, who may see things differently than I do. It gives some rationale to an agreement to disagree.

But it is, in my opinion, also unsatisfactory. It falls into a subjectivism from which there can be no issue. You see things one way, and I see them my way. It reduces religion to individualistic convictions. It makes argument impossible and seems to rob us of any criteria for passing judgments. We cannot even agree on what is good or bad, since our moral vision is also dependent on our intellectual convictions. What is good and what is bad cannot be isolated from what is true or false. This position leads directly to solipsism—and, ultimately, suffocation. Besides which, there is flagrant historical and phenomenological contradiction to this thesis. Religions are the least private of human phenomena. Culture, wars, politics, human relations of all sorts—all are influenced by the religious conviction of people and peoples.

In a less metaphysical parlance, this position converts religion into a commodity commandeered at the discretion of single individuals. I pick out the best religion for me. I may even concoct my own brand, a sort of cocktail. One chooses one's supposedly ultimate convictions like a consumer in a supermarket shopping for a favourite flavor of yogurt. And this allows a proliferation of religions that may well lead to the religious inflation nowadays rampant in some cultures.

Anyone can found a new religion.

This position should not be confused with the affirmation that religion has to be personal—as we defined religion. This confusion should be avoided on at least two counts: (a) from the side of the person and (b) from the side of the religion.

- (a) The more personal a religion is, the less it is individualistic. The person is relationship, a knot in the net of human, divine, and cosmic relations. A person is the simultaneous conjugation of all the personal pronouns: there is no I without a Thou and all the rest.
- (b) The more personal a religion, the more deeply it draws from the well of tradition and influences others and is in turn influenced by others.

Religions Are Historical Products

This often means that religions have a common historical origin, that they are historically related, and that their respective truths have to be understood historically. It assumes that truth is ultimately historical.

There are many merits in this position. It helps to explain the interactions and mutual influences of religions. It gives us an understanding of their similarities and differences, and it opens our minds to an understanding of religious variety in the world context.

Yet there are many questions left unanswered by such an approach, and it cannot cope with all the divergences. The historical fact of religion is certainly true, but religions are more—though not less—than historical facts. Ultimately, this is so because Man is more than history. Why has a historical fact like the burial of the dead had so very many different interpretations? To say that it is because the contexts were different only shifts the same question to the context. Moreover, there are religions that do not and probably cannot accept the myth of history as the field in which they unfold their basic experience, so that to offer only historical explanations would hardly be convincing. To trace the historical sources of Krishna worship, for instance, is totally irrelevant to the believing *Vaisnava*; the point is not whether we all come from a common experience, but the fact that my Krishna experience

today is what counts and is certainly not to be equated with any other. We do not exchange lovers. History plays an undeniable role, but history cannot explain everything.

Even assuming that we have succeeded in drawing a genealogical tree of all the religions, the fact would still remain that this tree produces not only apples but also oranges and many other fruits . . . some sweet, some sour, and not all equally edible. The variety of religious practices could perhaps be explained as expressions of the same urge, but doctrines often have a special claim to universality and truth that makes contradictory statements unacceptable. And this is my main point, bringing us to the sixth hypothesis, which—as already hinted—does not exclude the valid points of the previous ones. This sixth hypothesis comes to fill a gap left by the others. Its main distinction is that it attempts to overcome a monistic methodology without falling into a chaotic atomization of methods.

The A-Dualistic Hypothesis

Religions differ. There is no doubt about it. We see it, and they themselves affirm it. Some differ less than others, and we may even find some structural areas where they coalesce. All deal with the sacred; all recognize a certain transcendence, all have some sort of rituals, myths, and so on. But Man is not a skeleton; medicine is not anatomy, religion is not a formal structure. Everything depends on the flesh we put on those bones and the life that breathes into those structures.

Furthermore, religions have doctrines. One should not identify a religion with its doctrinal aspect, but one should not minimize it either. Most religions have an intellectual side. No great thinker of any religion, however, will identify the existential path—which religion *is*—with its intellectual formulation and interpretation. Nevertheless, the intellectual schema in and through which each religion expresses the crystallized vision of reality elaborated by its founders, doctors, and masters, that is, orthodoxy, is a manifestation of the basic human experience(s) of the representative people of that religion. These articulations of the fundamental convictions are the more or less clearly formulated dogmas or tenets of that religion. Each religious tradition offers the context out of which each school will carve its own text.

Now these texts are not only different, they are very often mutually contradictory. There are any number of mutually exclusive views of reality not only among the diverse traditions but also in the very interior of each tradition. We find this diversity of human opinions regarding ultimate matters to be as universal as any other human phenomenon.

Efforts toward harmony are necessary and welcome. This is a first and indispensable step. We may in this way dispel many misunderstandings, supplement different views, complement sparse ideas, criticize otherwise unnoticed inconsistencies, and so on. We all know from history and possibly also from personal experience that what, at a given time, was considered a stumbling block after a while becomes a common and accepted doctrine. There are interpenetrations, mutual influences, and even mutual fecundations, but the fact remains that in spite of all efforts at agreement and intellectual reconciliation, we are left with several well-articulated, complex, and yet mutually irreconcilable views of reality.

The many palliatives that philosophers, theologians, and religionists have excogitated in order to bring religious differences to a deeper unity or to a certain harmony work only up to a certain extent—generally to the extent to which what they say is meaningful for (mainly) one party in the discussion. We can call African religions polytheistic as long as the Africans themselves do not read our books; we can call Buddhists anonymous Christians as long as they do not retort by calling Christians anonymous Buddhists. We may call atheists believers in the Nothingness of the Absolute as long as atheists do not hear what we are saying about

them. There is an innate political impulse to reduce everything to our own categories of understanding, but, even stretching our categories to the utmost, reality imposes certain limits on this operation. In order to be meaningful, any language has to be accepted by the partner in dialogue or the party concerned. We cannot transgress the mutually accepted meaning of the words. The entire traditions of the respective partners are, as it were, on our shoulders, and we cannot stretch the meaning of the words beyond a given coefficient of flexibility.

The hard fact remains that for the present we disagree and do not see any way out. To retort that we have different contexts and perspectives certainly helps to dispel false and superficial incompatibilities, but it also shifts the disagreement to the level of those perspectives and calls for a justification of this shift. We cannot be so naive as to reduce all divergences to our passions, weaknesses, or lack of information.

Nagarjuna's efforts to overcome the plurality of doctrines are well-known and not unique. The Cartesian scandal regarding the plurality of mutually contradicting Christian theologies has been repeated time and again down the centuries. And yet philosophies, theologies, and religious discrepancies thrive well after all the dialectical, rational, mystical methods and philosophical stones have been thrown and overthrown. Almost every independent thinker in the history of human thought has wanted, if not to start afresh, at least to make a breakthrough that will convince listeners of the insufficiency of all intellectual answers prior to this particular contribution. Are we going to say that all our predecessors were wrong?

I am not propounding a sort of skeptical or agnostic attitude that contradicts itself the moment it is *formulated*; if we cannot be sure of anything, then we cannot be sure even of our uncertainty! I am not defending mere complementarity or perspectivism either—useful as these methods are for overcoming misunderstandings and hurried condemnations. I am in fact prepared to take a multiperspectival approach and say that *most* of the discrepancies between religious worldviews are complementary and supplemental aspects. The best thinkers of the world have been well aware that the content determines our perspective and that a problem can be seen from many angles. Yet when all is said and done, there still remain quite irreducible features that put our backs to the wall and seem to force us to say that we are right and you are wrong.

I am not satisfied with the eschatological consolation that here on Earth—as long as we are not *jāvanmuktas*, *comprehensores*, realized beings—we see only through a glass darkly and are enmeshed in the *avidyā* of an unavoidably fragmentary knowledge. Even if this were the case, the fact remains that, shortsighted as we may be, we still struggle with, differ from, and contradict one another because we take to heart all that we truly see, understand, and believe. In the end all may be well and we may all finally agree and see the whole truth, but meanwhile we cannot simply take our human divergences facetiously. It would amount to a sin against human dignity.

Ecumenism is all right. This is a noble and necessary task, but what I am now emphasizing is that the ideal is not the total and ultimate unity of just one religion, one philosophy, one theology or even one truth. The real world—and the human world especially—is one of variety and complexity, which of course does not exclude harmony. Uniformity is not the ideal, and monism is unconvincing. *Pluralism* penetrates to the very heart of the ultimate reality.

The problem then boils down to this: humans differ in the intellectual articulations of their basic experiences. The world religions are the place in which these divergences appear in a more crucial and radical way because they achieve an ultimate meaning. No wonder that the most serious wars of human history have been religious wars—not excluding the last war. I repeat that I am speaking at the ultimate level of discourse, once all the other resources at our disposal have been exhausted, to the extent of our powers. I am talking about the divergences

between a Shankara and a Ramanuja, an Aquinas and a Scotus, and a fortiori between an Averroes and an Abhinavagupta, a Luther and a Digen, a Marx and an Aurobindo, a Newman and a Maimonides, sociology of knowledge notwithstanding.

Now I can almost hear somebody saying that these are not religious differences. I would disagree. They are. Śaṅkara's *dharma* is different from Ramanuja's, in spite of our labeling them both "Hindū." St. Thomas's basic insights about analogy, essence, and existence equally form the basis of another religious attitude from that of Scotus, even if we find them both under the umbrella of Christianity.

However this may be, either we consider this state of affairs an anomaly (a result of original sin, alienation, our irritations, limitations, and the like, which are already religious notions), or this human condition reflects the very nature of the real without idealizations of any type.

The traditional answer is inclined to the former hypothesis, for obvious reasons of a moral and political character. One has to account for human shortcomings. In the monotheistic traditions, God cannot be made responsible for human imperfections of such a type. But the theoretical underpinning of such a belief is the widespread notion that reality has ultimately to be intelligible, that is, that there is a total correspondence between Thinking and Being—because God or the absolute Reality is pure Mind, sheer Spirit, perfect Consciousness, absolutely intelligible in itself (or Himself), and thus that the world is also intelligible to it or to Him. The traditional answer discloses a pyramidal hierarchy that is bent on maintaining that God knows everything, that the Church shares in this prerogative, that the emperor embodies the whole, that the master knows better, and the like. It is only we poor mortals, we ordinary believers, citizens and peasants, who do not have such a privilege. In itself, reality is assumed to be conceptually transparent.

One of the results of what I call the basic cosmotheandric experience is this: reality does not need to be totally intelligible in itself. The basic experience of the anthropocosmic experience sustains the intuition that the whole of reality has a threefold character of *Kosmos*, *anthropos*, and *Theos*—of matter, consciousness, and freedom: three mutually irreducible yet constitutively intertwined dimensions of the real.

Yet if we are to take religious pluralism seriously, I do not think we can avoid asserting that truth itself is pluralistic—at least for our time being, which is our being in time, and on which our thinking needs to rely.

To be sure, not all religions raise claims incompatible with all others. Many religions consider the religious behavior of the neighbor, even if contrary to the customs of "our" group, as something that demands religious reverence or approval. Yet even within the fold of any given single tradition, fundamental convictions arise that appear to be incompatible with others. A *vedāntin*, for instance, will respect a *mūrtipūjaka* and even agree that at a certain level of religious consciousness, image worship is that activity most conducive to liberation, but the *vedāntin* will equally maintain that at a certain and, indeed, superior stage such worship is not necessary and could even be harmful. Now it is the *vedāntin*, of course, who decides what this superior stage is.

A case for pluralism can be made by analyzing the common phrase that occurs when, after a serious and prolonged discussion of vital topics, we end by saying, "We agree to disagree." Just what does this mean? On *what*, precisely, are we really agreeing?

Let us put it that we are trying to elucidate the topic of God and whether we accept or deny this God, but also that bombings, torture, the politics of starvation, chemical warfare, and the like are also at stake in our intellectual discussion about God. Without pluralism, either the other is mentally weak or morally bad. In both cases, we have to take action. We cannot just tolerate the other spreading this poison around. The conflict can be reasonably

handled only if we assume that the other is also a source of understanding, and that from this other angle the dreadful consequences that I draw do not follow: an atheist may still go to heaven, a monotheist may still have a full and unalienated human existence, a militarist might still have the best means for peace. Real tolerance—by which I do not mean just coping with the other as long as it is not too serious or dangerous or harmful—can only be justified if pluralism belongs to the factual structure of reality.

Reality is not reducible to a single principle. Such a single principle could only be an intelligible principle. But Reality is not mind alone, or *cit* or consciousness, or spirit. Reality is also *sat* and *ānanda*, also matter and freedom, being and joy. *T'ai ki*, the Great Ultimate, is not the sum of yin and yang. Reality is not transparent to itself. It does not allow for a perfect reflection. Reality is also spontaneity, an ever new creation, an expanding energy. God's thought is divine and as such equal to God, but God is not just (His) Thought—as I could put it.

Are there then many truths? No. A plurality of truths (of the same thing and under the same aspect) is contradictory. Truth is *pluralistic*, we said. This amounts to saying that Being itself is pluralistic, that Reality is irreducible to a monolithic unity, irreducible to Intellect or Spirit. There is an apophatic, nonlogical dimension to reality (Freedom, Non-Being, Silence . . .) and also an opaque one (Matter, Energy, World . . .) besides the properly human dimension (Consciousness, Mind). Monism does not correspond to truth or (thus) to the nature of Reality. And yet dualism is not acceptable either. The very notion of dualism at this ultimate level supersedes itself (*hebt sich selbst auf*). We cannot speak intelligibly of dualism without assuming a deeper underlying unity that enables us to speak of *two* principles. If they are two, they have to be two more or less homogeneous specimens of a more basic unity. There is a bridge between the two.

Quite different is the case with what we have called pluralism, but whose more telling name at this juncture would be Trinity of *advaita*. This is neither monism nor dualism. The word *pluralism* is of course ambiguous. It does not mean here a kind of atomism or plurality of ultimate elements of the universe. At this level we prefer the expression *a-dualism*, which underlies most of the traditional wisdoms of the world.

Before we explain a little further this inherent polarity of reality, we must face a formidable difficulty: the problem of falsehood. Can there be a false religion? Does pluralism allow us to deal with such cases? Have we no tools or criteria to condemn a racist religiousness, for instance, or a religiosity of hatred? We shall say that this is a bad thing, and a wrongheaded worldview and, in as much as people live by it, a false religion; but religion it is and we shall have to reckon with it. These people are not just "cranky" or offbeat: evil is not a mere malady. It is not a mistake, an error of vision or perspective; it is a hatred, an aberration, an incomprehensibility. Evil is by definition impervious to human comprehension. This does not mean that everything unintelligible is evil, as the Gnostics are inclined to think. But it implies that there may be people grasped by the dark side of reality who put evil forward. Thus it is the very pluralism of the Real that gives to error *all* its tragic seriousness. Evil is more than a simple, real mistake.

Whatever merits or demerits pluralism may or may not have, it stands a better chance than the already too-well-known answers of monism and dualism. These latter two systems are able to give excellent theoretical justification for their respective viewpoints, but they fail to account for their disparity, or to give an explanation of the bare fact of ultimate human dissensions that would or could somehow embrace the dissenting party. No other alternative is left but the elimination of the party in the wrong. The other has to be defeated because ultimately error is sin, evil, and there can be no pact with the devil.

Pluralism, on the other hand, is neither individualistic subjectivism (private truths) nor impersonal objectivism (not only monolithic truth). With the former we could condemn nothing. With the latter we could condemn anything with which we disagree. The nondualistic approach accepts the relativity of truth, which should be emphatically distinguished from sheer relativism. This is to say that truth is constituted by the total relationship of things, because things *are* insofar as they are in relation to one another. But this relation is not a private relation between a subject and an object. It is a universal relationship, so that no private individual or closed group can exhaust any relationship. Truth is relational also to me, but never privately. On the other hand, truth is not an immutable or absolute quality totally objectifiable in concepts or propositions independent of time, space, culture, and people. Each person, as we said, is a source of self-understanding and of understanding, a knowing subject and not only a known object.

Where then are the criteria for distinguishing a true from a false religion to be found?

It is when this constitutive relativity of truth is hampered or endangered by isolation from its full gamut of relationships that we may fall into error. In other words, when an individual or in our case a particular religious worldview isolates itself from the rest of the world and does not accept dialogue, relationship, intercourse—when it becomes a sect refusing communication and eventually communion with the wider world—then this kind of totalitarianism condemns itself by the very fact of implicitly condemning all others. It goes without saying that I am not defending that the truth resides with the majority, or that it should all be publicized in the marketplace without any right to privacy or even to secrecy or esoterism; I am not denying the right of any religion to challenge the rest of the world. On the contrary, I am submitting that error entails precisely isolation, breaking of relations, excommunication. As long as there is dialogue, struggle, discussion, even disagreement, we will have conflicting opinions, differing and even contradictory views, but all this appertains to the very polarity of Reality.

In this view we also relativize error. From my vantage point my opponent is wrong, but not absolutely wrong unless the group or person in question breaks loose from (*ab-solutus*) the rest of us.

Pluralism can only be consistent without falling into a self-defeating irrationalism if we release Being from the strictures of thinking, that is, if Being can expand and ultimately *be* without having to follow already established logical rules. Thinking is bound to Being, to what is or what there is. Thinking detects reality and has to be adherent to it. Thinking *follows* Being and tells us what Being is. Thinking can always catch up, as it were, with the new adventures of Being. It is not just that thinking penetrates into the mysteries of Being. Thinking does so, certainly. But it also does something else—and more. Thinking dis-covers, un-veils what Being is “doing,” so to speak, that is, what Being is “being” without curtailing it to what thinking has “thought” of it until now. Because the relationship between Thinking and Being is not a closed one. Being, or as I would like to say, Reality transcends thinking. Reality is free; it is not bound to proceed along the lines “eternally” fixed by thinking. It can expand, jump, surprise itself. . . . Freedom is the divine aspect of being. Being speaks! This is a fundamental religious experience consecrated by many a tradition. We have then to hear Being speak, and not just to think about it. Thinking follows what Being is doing, as it were, that is, what Being is being. By thinking I can know what Being has been, but not what may (yet) be.

Now authentic religions are like explosions, manifestations, expressions of Being. They couch in themselves these basic experiences that represent mutations, as it were, in the very

life of Being. They are like the explosion or appearance or creation of novas, exploding stars, in the astronomical universe.

Out of nowhere, with no logical relation to what is there, the ultimate religious intuitions are leaps in the being of Being. Deductive thinking is of no avail here, where we touch on the heart of spontaneity, the core of a Being that is still be-ing and not just has-been.

The challenge of religious pluralism liberates us from the servitude of Being to what *was*. It prevents us from deducing what is and even what shall be and what must be from what we already know. It opens up and out into a free future that no deductive thinking power can ever fathom. Being expresses itself in different ways; it also thinks in different manners.

Religions reveal to us different facets of Truth because Reality is itself pluralistic. If we are unable to bring the different basic experiences of humankind into a single thought-system, this is simply because Reality is that Mystery that transcends not only our thinking but thinking as such. The variety of ultimate human traditions is thus arrayed like the spectrum of the splendid colors in nature. We should not be monochromatically obsessed myopics, but loving gardeners of all that grows in the valleys, on the slopes, and up to the unconquerable peaks of that Reality of which we are the human partners.

THE GOSPELS AND CULTURAL PLURALITY

The understanding of religious messages is the result of listening to them and putting them into practice; hence this takes place only at a later stage. Usually when we come into contact with the sacred Christian Scriptures we are conditioned by layers of history (not necessarily Christian), which end up by obscuring the original meaning with all too commonplace, if nothing short of reductive, words. The Gospels are not easy to understand unless one puts them into practice.

Most Christians, with a few exceptions at different times and in different places, have believed they had the copyright on the Gospels, and when they used them in non-Christian environments they did so to evangelize, which, if it is not confused with indoctrination, is in itself a perfectly legitimate intention.

Furthermore the normal Christian exegesis of the Gospels, for the most part, consisted in an interpretation within the historical context of the Judaic-Hellenic-Roman culture of the times when they were written. For the correct hermeneutics of a text, one must be familiar with the context and, I may add, the intention of the writer. Thousands of books have been written about the Gospels to the extent that it is from the actual interpretation of the Bible that modern hermeneutic science originates. There has even been a development of a corpus of interpretations of the Scriptures that has won ecclesiastical approval and makes up what is called the Christian tradition, an obligatory framework for every Christian interpretation that claims to be orthodox. The sacred Christian Scriptures cannot ignore the corpus of the tradition that accompanies them. Rather the *sola scriptura* is a typical heresy of a historical period of modern individualism, but it is an impossibility, because a Scripture written about twenty centuries ago is not unique; layers of dust have covered it, and infinite rays of light have illuminated it. Furthermore, our own lenses are blurred by two thousand years of history.

For centuries the distinct branches of wisdom have survived undisturbed in splendid and peaceful, reciprocal isolation. Today this is no longer possible. No religion can ignore its neighbors. It is as if we are being bounced back against each other, and every coexistence has its own problems!

When, almost half a century ago, I was about to start translating a considerable part of the sacred Hindū Scriptures, some Christian friends of mine warned me that they should be used for Christian prayer. Evidently one can use the psalms and hymns of non-Christian or pagan origins, but never ever the Vedas. On the other hand, some Hindū friends pointed out that a Roman Catholic priest could not expect to understand the Hindū mantras, still less read them without profaning them. To know something is to enter into that thing; to understand a thing, one must somehow be part of that thing. This is the only way to experi-

* Appeared as "Evangelio y pluralidad cultural," *Sufi*, no. 3 (2002); revision of the Prologue to L. Mazzocchi and J. Forzani, *Il Vangelo secondo Giovanni e lo Zen*, vol. 2 (Bologna: Dehoniana, Bologna, 2001).

ence its true essence. It is certainly correct to claim that without faith one cannot adequately understand a sacred text. However, faith should not be confused with belief. I have introduced the notion of *pisteuma* in religious phenomenology, in contrast to the *noëma* of traditional phenomenology. *Pisteuma* (from *pistis*, faith) is what the believer believes; *noëma* (from *noûs*, mind) is what an *observer* understands. Religious phenomenology takes on the task of describing what the believer believes and not what the observer observes. If the observer, an *outsider*, confines himself to describing what he observes, he certainly will not describe what a believer believes.

The answer I gave my critics was that the Vedas belong to humanity and that my hermeneutics (like any translation) was legitimate so long as I participated in that human spirit which had inspired *śruti*, the Vedic revelation. The surprising thing was that when I had finished the job, I was recognized by many *pandits* as a reincarnated *ṛṣi*, one of the wise men who were the first to recite the Vedas. Otherwise how could I have written what I had? By saying this I want to underline how different the reaction of another culture can be.

I entirely agree that a sacred text must be treated with respect, that some type of arcane discipline is justified, and that some type of initiation is required to successfully approach any sacred text, by which it becomes elevated to the level of a liturgical action. Democracy is a good antidote to theocracy, but it has a disastrous side effect if it destroys every kind of hierarchy. It is not my job to prescribe antidotes. We need to respect the tradition; otherwise the living traditions become frozen mummies. Instead of remaining attached to lifeless traditions just because they were considered alive in the past (cf. Mt 15:2ff.; 23:25ff., etc.), what we need is the vital breath of the Spirit.

Is it appropriate to explain the Gospels outside of their own context? Is it not that the intellectual ownership of the Gospels belongs to the specific Christian tradition? Here two questions arise: first, the philosophical one of whether the Gospels are merely a historical narration, and second, the strictly theological question of whether the evangelical message is essentially linked to the natural or to the adoptive children of Israel or Abraham?

Without doubt the Gospels intend to transmit far more than simply historical and intellectual information. The first words Jesus spoke in public were an invitation to *metanoia* (conversion), to the transcending of *noûs*, to overcoming the dimension of the mind and also the mind-set of the stock of Abraham. When Paul was ordered to go among the Gentiles, was it simply to instruct them in Jewish cultural customs or rather to make the Incarnation of the Word possible in other cultures, too? The spiritual interpretation is more than legitimate, and by using the word *spiritual* I refer to that Spirit that blows where, when, and how it wishes.

The challenge that I mentioned at the beginning must take place in the unprecedented situation of our third millennium. We must recognize the *signs of the times*. May I be permitted to formulate this precise question: Do the Gospels merely refer to the historical figure of a Man called Jesus, or are they talking, from the very start, of the Christ Jesus whom the Archangel Gabriel described as the Son of the Almighty and who was announced to the shepherds as the Savior, the Anointed One, and the Lord? Certainly, the resurrected Christ was the historical Jesus, but the subject of the Gospels is not the story of him who was believed to be the son of Joseph; but rather they refer to the prehistory and the story of the Son of God who walks like a real man in a particular land and at a particular time. The modern leaning toward the historical Jesus has brought interesting characteristics to the surface about that country Jew and Mediterranean miracle worker, but it has also distracted exegetes and scholars from that which is the heart of the Gospels. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Napoleon also changed the course of history and, as modern historians like to say, *the face of the earth*. Of which earth? Are the Gospels simply historical books?

In other words, for historical and other reasons that the sociology of knowledge help us to discover, the worldview of the early Christian centuries had stopped at the pretty limited geographical and historical notion of the *oikoumenê*:¹ today, nobody would dare to maintain that the six days of Moses were of twenty-four hours or that the land of the Gospels also included Patagonia. Nevertheless the syndrome of a single world that was the equivalent of our world has persisted until our times. During the first Christian centuries it was thought that the Roman Empire was the extent of the whole civilized world; the formula *urbi et orbe*, which later became the formula used by the pope, was the customary Latin expression that reflected this Imperial mentality: *orbis in urbe iacet* (the whole world is contained in the city of Rome), and I could make more and more examples right up to Copernicus and modern global ideology. What happens in space similarly happens to time, although this is not the place to hold a dissertation on eschatological expectations or the resurrection. That the revelation terminates with the last of the apostles has no doubt been a useful Christian theological belief as to believe Islam to be a heresy and the Baha'i to be mistaken. However, this reasoning leaves us enclosed in the culture of the stock of Abraham. How can we justify these extrapolations of ours? Is eschatological time the end of linear temporality?

There is no doubt that the Christian Scriptures belong to the Abrahamic cultural stock grafted onto Hellenic culture. It should be pointed out that this "inculturization" or mutual fecundation between the Hebrew and Hellenic cultures is a pre-Christian phenomenon, as is testified by the incredible intercultural activity on the part of the authors of the Septuagint in the third century BC Alexandria, which culminated in Philo, who was almost a contemporary of Christ. What Philo did with Judaism became a model for the church fathers of the first centuries. However, it would appear that this creative movement stopped there, except for a few incidental changes introduced by later European culture. I am citing these facts because for over half a millennium it seems that listening to the Gospels has been reduced to listening to echoes of the past.

It is a fact that outside the Hellenic-Semitic spectrum the Hebrew Bible sounds exotic, extraneous, and sometimes incomprehensible, not to say scandalous. In their simplicity the Greek Gospels are more congenial to other cultures, but the theology that arises from them, which is built on them, cannot be understood outside Mediterranean norms of intelligibility. Maybe other peoples of the world must undergo a mental circumcision since physical circumcision was abolished by the first Council of Jerusalem? I believe in that primordial sacrament of Yahweh with his people, but we cannot extrapolate here either. Judaism can stand on its own feet and does not need protection and still less to be absorbed by a new religion that the synagogue has rejected. But this is not the place to talk of pluralism.

My question is not whether Christians need to sow the seeds of the Gospels everywhere; instead the doubt arises that for some people *inculturalization* does not mean sowing seeds (symbols) but rather fostering the growth of plants (conceptual systems). It is not surprising that those seeds (*semina Verbi*) do not produce many fruits, not because the soil is infertile but because the subsoil is different. Not all plants can grow in the same soil or in the same climate. What I am talking about is *interculturalization*—that is, mutual fecundation. The question is whether the sacred Scriptures, insofar as they are religious Scriptures, have something to say to peoples who are neither children of Abraham nor the grandchildren

¹ The inhabited earth, the known world, and thus, the universe.

of European cultures. Should we read the Gospels as interesting cultural documents or as religious (spiritual) messages?

My query regards Christian identity. Do Christians wish to maintain their identity, safeguarding the differences (the principle of noncontradiction), or by underlining their self-understanding (the principle of identity)?

Both yes and no are reasonable and quite legitimate answers. To give a reply on the Christian front, I have for years invoked the second Council of Jerusalem since I have no authority to decide the fate of the Christian Church. The latter is at a crossroads: it needs to decide if the Christian community is what remains of Israel, the little flock; that is, does it have the courage to follow the example of the first Council, which broke from Judaism and abolished the foundational pact of Yahweh with his people (circumcision), thus *liberating* the kenotic Christ, universal symbol of resurrection, liberation, realization, salvation, and fullness, the destiny of the whole of reality? I will use very traditional Christian symbolism: Mary, the Mother of God (*theotokos*), gave birth to Jesus, and then Jesus lived out his adult life. In the same way the church of the third millennium, as an icon of Mary, gives birth to the Christ who is incarnated in the sons of Man in ways that are not our business to determine or even foresee. I could insinuate, while I am at it, that if an adult church had cut the umbilical cord with Judaism and had recognized the independent value of the Bible, without expecting to have a more authoritative interpretation than the Judaic one, the wave of anti-Semitism would maybe never have arisen or at least not in such a violent manner.

One of my critics once wrote that instead of Christianizing Hinduism, which was what I should have been doing, I was Hindūizing Christianity, and that this was a heresy. I politely replied that Christianity was alive thanks to the symbioses between Greece, Rome, Europe, modernity, and the like. Why should we stop the wind, or better, the breeze of the Spirit—a Spirit that makes all things move and millenniums ago swept every human dream of a single universal language away, as recounted in the episode of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis?

Jewish ethnocentrism is quite understandable. Yahweh is the God of a people, his people, whom he defended against their enemies—the tragic magnitude of that people who lived in the Diaspora, without weapons and often without power, surrounded by gentiles who were often not very kind. (“Gentile” in Italian also means kind.) Their only hope lay in the protection of their God.

Tension is perceived right from the beginning. The Bible as a religious book undoubtedly belongs to Israel, but the sacred Christian Scriptures—even they were merely a religious book—belong to no particular people. Christianity is not an ethnic religion, and this is the point I wish to make. In the beginning this was not obvious. What right do we have to think that the message of that Jew can transcend the borders of Judea and Galilee? Did John the Baptist not maybe become a disciple so as to follow the path of the conversion of the heart? I emphasize: *the heart*. Was he not maybe a young rabbi who believed he had only been sent for the people of Israel who needed the love of a mother for her daughter to break with that orthodoxy (Mt 15:22ff.)? Did he not also believe in knowledge (Lk 2:51), and wasn’t he rejected by his own people and crucified outside the Holy City as the first-generation Christians intentionally underlined? And above all, was he not supposed to rise from the dead on the third day? However, in Christ there are neither Jews nor Greeks, slaves or free men . . . not even men or women (Gal 3:28). The Gospels are not the story of Jesus the Jew; they are the story of Jesus the Christ, the risen Christ.

Christianity is not a religion of the book but rather of the Word. The word needs to be listened to. It is somewhat ironic that divine Providence has decreed that we actually do not know a single phrase spoken by Jesus. St. Thomas Aquinas magnificently claims that Jesus should not have written anything; otherwise his living message would have been converted into mere doctrine (*Summa theol.* III, q.42, a.4).

To return to what we said at the beginning, it is understandable that those who believe they have the responsibility of preserving the purity of the doctrine are not easily convinced by the good intentions of those theologians who go beyond the established boundaries. The situation is analogous to that of the Syrian Phoenician woman: disquisitions devoid of love create confusion or even harm. My meaning is that we should not approach the question dialectically, or in other words, doctrinally. The words of eternal life are granted to those who are truly thirsty. It is harder for the learned and the rich. Obviously we can neither reduce Christianity to a doctrine nor eliminate the mystical content from the Scriptures without neglecting their doctrine. Christ's unique message was to give us peace and liberate us from fear.

To put it more academically, we are witnessing a crisis of the dominant Western myth: the myth that a single culture can suffice to embrace the entire spectrum of human experience. According to that myth, kings, emperors, popes, presidents and armies, in good faith, have instigated a project of political, religious, or economic unification of the world. This project went by the name of colonialism; now it has taken on other names: globalization or global ethics, universal science, and so on. This myth is undergoing a crisis, or may be actually on the verge of collapse. Catholic is neither the universal nor the doctrinal, the geographic nor the historical: it is the fullness to which every being is called (Jn 1:16).

PLURALISM, TOLERANCE, AND CHRISTIANITY

Description of the Theme

The first part puts forward the description of three concepts: *pluralism*, *tolerance*, and *Christianity*. This is not an irrelevant task, because if we speak from a Christian point of view we must apply Christian concepts, and these concepts are not adaptable or accommodating; they are new and distinctive because Christ and His Spirit make everything new and consequently the concepts in themselves. This is why the concepts we apply have a deep ambivalence, a double meaning—that is, pluralism.

Pluralism

On the one hand, pluralism can be a liberalist concept: all systems are equivalent, it is not possible to reach the truth, contradictions are necessary and multiple truths exist. In any case there can be no access to a definitive truth. This pluralism inevitably leads to the concept of tolerance as well as indifference, such as lack of resistance to evil, a certain negligence and skepticism toward the ultimate questions of human existence. Paradoxically this also explains (there are always some internal dialectics) why it is only adopted for individual freedom, from an individualistic viewpoint and not for the freedom of the community. Liberalism, this type of pluralism, boasts of having conquered the respect of individual freedom but in a way that means that the individual within society (the individual is always within society) cannot be free. This is the realm of extreme autonomy. All the speakers have rejected this interpretation of pluralism.

However, on the other hand, pluralism can also mean that in this so very varied world, no monolithic uniformity exists. Actually there is only one truth, yet it has a pluridimensional reality, not because reality or truth are not one but insofar as *we* are not one. It would be utopic or mere idealism to believe in a clear and well-defined truth that exists in some no-man's-land and that we all hope to approach. Truth always indicates agreement and a bridge. In other words, we still find ourselves treading the path toward this truth. Just as the path toward the highest summit in the world can be multivalent, in the same way there can be more than one path toward this truth. In this way pluralism emphasizes the existence of a possible space for freedom. Thus it is not a matter of that reactionary autonomy of liberalist concepts, but of a mature *autonomia* (if you will allow me to use this term), the intimate law of the different hierarchical spheres of being, without going to the other extreme of heteronomy. We are not talking about a plurality of truths but rather of more than one aspect of a truth. This is pluralism of the social order, which in itself, and for itself, cannot be eliminated from this world. Furthermore, we hear talks of a pluralism of world

* First published as "Die Toleranz der Christenheit" in *Pluralismus, Toleranz und Christenheit* (Nürnberg: Abendändische, 1961), 117–42.

conceptions and religious pluralism. It would almost be like falling into temptation if we wanted to have solutions here on earth without having attained the end: definitiveness. This characteristic of pilgrimage identifies the man of all human values, of philosophy, of theology, and undoubtedly also of religion, as the Second Coming has not yet arrived. All these are values of pilgrimage. They are still treading the path and are therefore not only open but also, in a precise sense yet to be defined, provisional, temporary. They always tend toward a definitive state. This is where true tolerance begins.

Christendom

Christendom is also an ambivalent concept. First of all we should precisely distinguish between Christendom and Christianity. Christianity corresponds to the teachings of Christ or the wholeness of the Christian being.

Let me illustrate my point in a lighthearted but nevertheless serious way. We are very much attached to the conceptual world, and the concept is always the mediator, a means that leads us to another reality. It seems to me that a large part of the Western world is happy with an "in-between-world." So the story about the postman comes to mind. A young man receives a letter and becomes quite desperate. With tears in his eyes he sighs, "For two years I have written to my girlfriend every day and today she replies that she is going to marry the postman!" For three or four centuries Western mentality has been dealing with the postman. For three or four centuries we have been treading this "middle way" through apologetics, philosophy, and Christianity, as if driven by a kind of mental processing, and now the West, or a large part of it, has fallen in love with the postman. Yet now is it maybe no longer possible to transcend the ideas, the concepts, the "in-between-world" of things and to talk about a confusion of the East? All the things that we are explaining here are just letters, and we have read the letters, or better, we have looked the postman in the eye because "the daughters of men are beautiful" and perhaps men have come to a standstill contemplating the daughters of the world, thus losing sight of the true author.

I am adding this short explanatory introduction: the Christ is one thing, Christianity is another, and Christendom (this was my theme) is a third thing.

On the one hand Christendom denotes the dream of a monolithic order within the world, a harmonious order—as if original sin were not a historical reality. In this case Christendom indicates that a single monolithic order does exist. Christ, Christendom, the Church, Christian policy, the Christian family: all these are unequivocally established. No other possibility exists, if not an unequivocal concept of all this, which emerges in no uncertain terms from heteronomous thought. If the first concept of pluralism leads to nonchalant tolerance—that is, indifference—this concept of Christianity, in this case, leads to intolerance. The individual is not free; perhaps only a totality of an order, be it socialism, totalitarianism, or any of the falsified ideas of the kingdom of God on earth, can possess a semblance (incorrect) of freedom. At most this leads to a tolerance in the sense of a tactic, and nothing more. Today there is much talk of Marxism as a secularized, deconsecrated Christendom. Nevertheless within the Christian world there is a temptation toward a Christendom without Christ, exactly like that of a Christ without a cross or a resurrection.

If one becomes bogged down in unequivocal concepts, everything is guided by a logical, inhuman order that makes the reaction of humanism understandable. However, a conception of Christendom does exist, according to which Christianity is not simply an idea and does not simply belong to a spiritual religious sphere. According to the latter, Christianity must also be incarnated in the world, and this incarnation is personal, an act of freedom. Thus a

polyvalent Christian order is possible. One could say that Christendom is the ultimate and terrestrial structure of the terrestrial condition. Christendom should not be equated with the church, although Christendom belongs to the church, just as my hand, although it cannot be equated with my person or my personality, belongs to me. Christendom is the ultimate expression not only of a Christian idea but of the "Christian" reality.

Tolerance

This brings us to the concept of tolerance, which we have already almost described. At first we considered tolerance as a form of negligence or indifference. All of us have excluded this type of tolerance, which is almost an intolerant tolerance.

This is exactly the paradox of a certain type of pluralistic society.

However, tolerance can also be something quite different when it is not a tactic but a faith, since Christ contains everything, takes on everything, transforms everything, and in this embrace transforms everything that He contains. At times this could give the impression of an intolerant tolerance, and this was the great misfortune of the Middle Ages.

Summary

Now I would like to approach a summary. To summarize, our hands must be free so that we can put all the little pieces we have gathered together: the hands of intelligence and the ability to understand are the concepts with which we grasp this question.

It seems to me that the Western mentality is geared more toward undertaking than understanding. After Descartes, and especially after Kant, the West has become proud of the discovery that each type of knowledge is more of an undertaking than an understanding. This is why a thing in itself (*Ding an sich*) exists, that is, attached and therefore modified. It even leads to the principle of Heisenberg's indetermination. Nevertheless, is there not also a knowledge that is more a being grasped than a grasping? Our hands are usually busy with so many things that we can hardly sum them up. "Gather the pieces that are left over, let nothing be wasted" (Jn 6:12). We already know everything and maybe we have lost the innocence of ignorance. So as to free our hands a little, and be able to better carry out the recomposition, I would like to introduce two groups of thought that make up the second part of my talk.

I would like to call the first group of concepts *microdoxy*.

Microdoxy

Description

I will offer just one example by way of introduction.

When the Portuguese reached India three and a half centuries ago, they believed quite sincerely that the so-called Christians of St. Thomas, the Jacobites, were heretics. In fact, priests could marry, the population did not have to kneel during Communion and even dared to drink from the chalice. They had in no way understood transubstantiation (almost believing that it was some kind of divine trick during which everything undergoes metamorphosis), and Mass was read in the vernacular. Everyone understood, spoke, and sang in a confused manner. Furthermore, they used certain formulations, in no way exemplary, that gave cause to consider the Jacobites to be Monophysites. In brief, it was the beginning of the great Byzantine Schism. That was the *Zeitgeist* of the times.

It should be clear that microdoxy does not mean heterodoxy. The doxy is correct; it is just reduced, minimized. It is no longer a doxy, an opinion that indicates what one means. The doxy of microdoxy has already been established; it is identified with the formulas without penetrating agreed reality, the "*res significata*," as St. Thomas Aquinas would say.

In microdoxy the doxy is identified with a particular content—that is, a specific horizon, with a completely established worldview. Microdoxy is not able to make distinctions; instead it divides. This is not a simple problem because doxy can neither be identified with a worldview, with a formulation or a formula, nor can it remain hanging in the air with no formula and no body. It cannot exist without a guise and without being incarnated. In my opinion this is exactly where modern Western *kairos* lies, willing to disrobe in the name of the said question so as to receive a new body. Because he who does not leave himself behind . . .—this also goes for many cultures as well as all the different realities of world history. Microdoxy thus means the identification of the doxy, of the right faith, of the orthodoxy of a certain, established, no longer open nor mysterious reality that lies behind it. When, for example, S. Radhakrishnan describes the Christian conception and when K. Jaspers criticizes the Catholic conception, one often cannot but agree; however, it must be added that what they are criticizing does not concern the orthodoxy. They only touch one conception of microdoxy, which is possibly quite praiseworthy, but of which Christians have also made themselves guilty by allowing this impression to be perceived from the outside. Nevertheless, what is criticized from the outside is not the orthodox Christian doctrine of a determined problem but rather the microdoxy.

The Premises of Microdoxy

We would now like to consider the possible microdoxic interpretation of our problem: microdoxy, the tacit and microdoxic premise for a possible formulation of the issues arising from our question.

When in Bengal, after three whole centuries of Christian life, the Catholic liturgy was translated into the Bengalese language, the translator, who was a Belgian Jesuit priest (and a good friend of mine), received a visit from a scholar from Calcutta who complimented him on his work. He said that for the first time he was able to grasp a little of what was going on during the administration of the sacraments meant and truly understand what the priest was murmuring. Previously he would never have imagined that this would have been possible. Everything was wonderfully clear. However, he allowed himself to point out that one word in the translation was not correct. Instead of "Catholic Church," meaning *Catholic*, the good Jesuit had used the term for universal, all-embracing; he certainly had not meant an all-embracing, universal religion but his own sect, his "Catholic" sect, the religion of the Faringhi. The professor from Calcutta did not think it was possible that the Catholic religion could present itself as an all-embracing, universal, ecumenical religion, incorporating and embracing all the other religions and absolutely not on the same level as them.

He had always believed that "Catholic" was the name of a Christian sect from Rome.

Tolerance, a Lesser Evil?

This brings us to our question: How should a Christian behave in a pluralistic society? Should he, as I have been asked, maybe appear to be tolerant and become a missionary? Allow me to make a little analysis of the tacit premise behind this question. It is not my intention to carry out psychoanalysis, but I would like to undertake a sort of basic analysis of a certain contemporary mind-set.

Around this formulation of the question there is a sort of atmosphere that makes tolerance seem to be the lesser evil. Where pluralism really exists, one can only be tolerant. Where pluralism does not exist, tolerance is not even necessary.

If we are so good at letting go of pluralism, thence tolerance falls away together at the same time because its foundation is removed. Basically this conception of microdoxy implies that if we can easily live without tolerance, all the better!

It is revealing how in the *Dizionario Herder per la Teologia e la Chiesa* (or at least in the old edition) the term "tolerance" does not appear. Also in the various volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* there is no mention of tolerance. Furthermore it is also interesting that in the *Dictionnaire de la Bible* the term "ennemi" (enemy) does not exist, and neither does the term "violence." If one leafs through the *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique* in search of "tolerance," one finds that it is treated almost exclusively from a legalistic-moralistic point of view. In 1928 the theologian Capello defines tolerance as "permissio negativi mali," denying the characteristic of virtue. According to this version, tolerance is a compromise, simply extricating oneself and getting by. This would be a question exclusively pertinent to moral theology when the situation is not as it should be, a sort of technique that teaches us how to tolerate evil. The development of all possible distinctions, direct intentions, indirect intentions, subdirect intentions, and so on follow on from here. This would seem to be the scope of tolerance, a position deriving from a microdoxic conception. It corresponds to the position that comes from the lost dream of paradise that Christendom wanted to and should have established, but without success. This would mean that differences of opinion do not belong to actual human existence but they need only be temporarily borne and if possible extinguished. According to this conception, tolerance is at most a question of intelligence that can decide and distinguish when to show tolerance. The policy of adapting, which today is largely adopted by the missions, gives us an example. The natives ("the good Negroes") can maintain their customs for the meantime. Let's leave them to it; they're having a good time! We can allow ourselves to be generously tolerant; it won't be a threat. Maybe in this way we can obtain their friendship. Now the Indians want more; they want to celebrate Mass barefoot. We can allow that, too! If it makes the natives happy we can be tolerant. In this example, tolerance undoubtedly corresponds to the lesser evil. I could give many more similar examples, none of them particularly amusing.

Tolerance, a Practical Necessity

Now there is another tacit premise to this formulation of the problem. We are on the path to overcoming it, and suffice it to note that all the speakers at this congress have rejected the concept of tolerance of this kind.

The next aspect of the question would be the following: tolerance is inevitable; conflict must come because Christ is something more than Man, because the latter should respect the commandments received, and on the one hand should be acquiescent to tolerance and on the other he should not surrender because this would imply a lack of faith. Thus, conflict is inevitable, so now a neutral level and a common basis must be found, so as to be able to live together peacefully and practice tolerance. We can call it natural law, natural religion, human nature, social order, or the intimate structure of the created; in short it would correspond to a profane area, a neutral philosophy where communication, understanding, and cooperation are possible but without involving the figure of Christ. He would not be part of it. Only at this price can one believe one is going along with the criticism

of others that perceives Christians as intolerant individuals, with whom one cannot reach an understanding and who always want something different. Through a similar concept of tolerance, one can believe it is possible to reach this level as Christians, a desacralized zone, separate from the created, where one can comfortably concede everything because at this level we would all be equal.

However, this sort of behavior presupposes that being Christian is merely something extra, an accident of human nature, as if Christ were only *my* God, an idol of mine, my prophet, always mine and not, as the Latin liturgy still reminds us today: Alpha and Omega, Firstborn and Mediator between this extra-divine order and God. As if He were not the All in One, Christ the Creator, Christ the Redeemer, and Christ the Glorifier as an indissoluble whole. And because a Christian must actually be one with Christ, we must apply the four noted adverbs of the Council of Calcedonia to our being Christians; otherwise we will become more and more fragmented and carry out our Christian mission and the realization of ourselves as Christians overshadowed by feelings of inferiority. My being a Christian and being a Man must be *inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*. Neutral spheres do not exist. It is just because Christ is also Creator, Redeemer, and Glorifier that for Christians there is no sphere independent of Christ outside this Christian reality.

The same thing could be described in a slightly different and simpler way. It is a well-known incident and occurred at the German Reichstag during the last century. A member of parliament spoke of Providence, the transcendence, and the dominion of the absolute on the destiny of the German people. Another member jumped to his feet and shouted angrily, "God is the name of this man!" Well, I wanted to express the same thing: "Christ is the name of this man!" That is: nature, society, Christianity. . . . Christ is the name of this man! To believe that Christ is only mine or only for us orthodox (microdoxic) Christians, is a microdoxic conception. The Christ is much more than this. Until we overcome this microdoxic conception we will find it hard to establish dialogue with non-Christians, without at the same time betraying our faith and coming close to encountering with feelings of guilt.

The Three Christian Spheres

I would now like to examine three concepts that I believe could indicate a positive solution to this meeting and this understanding: Christ (the shared Christ) has the function of *koinonia*, of *diakonia* and of *kerygma* (all this should be understood in an absolutely metatheological sense).

Koinonia

If all men have received their nature from Christ, if the so-called natural religions and all the natural order only take on meaning and reality with Christ, for Christ, and in Christ, then the Christian not only "tolerates" the natural order but also contributes to it. He is present and collaborates, he recognizes himself as the brother of his brothers and wishes to contribute to the edification of every human structure (as he cannot belong to a neutral sphere). He does not do this as an outsider or he who condescends, but rather as he who in full awareness is fulfilling an authentic and primary Christian task. The Christian, insofar as he is a Christian, is in communion and in community with everything that exists on earth. He tolerates the non-Christian but not out of a sort of condescension regarding a neutral sphere where everyone understands each other. Insofar as he is a Christian, he has no privileges because all the others are equally in *koinonia* with Christ, all are participants.

Diakonia

Christ the Creator is at the foundation of *koinonia*; Christ is, however, also Mediator and Redeemer, and for Christians this implies the task and the duty of *diakonia*. Nobody can reach the Father if not through the Son (as Professor Rahner also reminded us), redemption is universal, and a Christian must be connected to this work. He is the servant of others, and not only does he have the right but also the duty to carry out this service, this *diakonia*. To love his neighbor is his task on earth. His question maybe corresponds, on the contrary, to the prayer to be tolerated so that he can serve; this is already his mission without further considerations.

Kerygma

And finally Christ is the Glorifier, the Lord, and only in faith can one turn to Him as such. He is the Lord for everyone. However only Christians recognize and profess it; this calling requires the freedom of the annunciation, the task given to us by God. This annunciation is in no way an imposition, a constriction from above. Again, in this case, it is not the Christian who tolerates others but instead he asks for their tolerance.

The Christian announces Christ; in this way every Christian is a missionary (which hints at the question examined previously), because he recognizes Him, loves Him, and believes He is the Lord, and even if he realizes this existentially in the correct manner, in any case one does not ask to what end. No man who is truly in love asks himself why. He loves the Lord and has no choice in the matter. He recognizes His miracles and gladly and of his own free will (maybe not with self-awareness but with authentic awareness) does just what the earth, the flowers, the clouds, and the rivers do: he simply sings and proclaims the glory of the Lord. He does this and nothing else; he has no ulterior motive when he allows *kerygma* to resonate, because only the Lord has the keys and the solution to the mysteries of history. A Christian does this with simplicity; he cannot do anything else; he is in love and entrusts all the rest to Him because he knows that he is nothing more than a useless servant. He sings the praises of the Lord!

Orthopraxis

These were the two premises that I wished to illustrate briefly: the first leads to the conception of microdoxy of our question and considers tolerance to be the lesser evil, while the second understands tolerance as a necessity based on practice rather than theory.

And now for the second concept that I wanted to take into consideration. This also has a new name: *orthopraxis*. In my opinion, tolerance only emerges when it overcomes the excessively intellectualistic sphere and enters into being, higher or deeper. Usually the question of tolerance is raised in relation to the Christian claim to the truth. This is also correct. Christian truth, however, is not merely essence; it is not simply an intellectual agreement. Above all it is existence and the agreement that must be reached in complete imitation, or better, in fulfillment, in a realization of Christ. The truth is Christ that leads us to the concept of orthopraxis.

We would like to find the necessary basis for tolerance. With this goal we must overcome simple orthodoxy (previously we considered various examples). This can primarily be demonstrated through purely dialectical motivations. If it is *only* a question of doctrine, it follows that, by virtue of the principle of contradiction, who sustains A cannot at the same time defend B.

Description

Only by introducing this concept of orthopraxis can Christian tolerance find its space and location. So what is orthopraxis? A brief description follows to apply it to our question.

How should a Christian behave? This was our question. We all know how he "should," insofar as duty must be based on being: on the being of a Christian man and also the being of a pluralistic society. Nevertheless, being is not merely an inert substance, but it is also dynamic, in becoming, a becoming-being. All over the earth there is becoming, in growth. Man is a pilgrim; his being is still becoming; he is not yet, and one day he will be. This is why it is written that he will become God. The Christian task is not *only* knowledge nor simply defense of the truth. The task is to join with the truth, to become truth. St. John says, "Truth must be done." Doing, right action, this is what is important. I want to stress that this is not a superficial activity, and neither is it simply acting moralistically; rather it is a liturgical action, sacral, pregnant with being, through which Man cooperates with his own salvation and the salvation of the world (the word "Christian," also present in the other religions, is the last to be mentioned). This is not just the supremacy of the existential, but rather, it is that Theandric practice that has always gone by the name of worship, within which the world survives and reaches its goal. Man is here on earth to bring about his salvation; he acts and fights with God (with Christ) so that the universe (not excluding ourselves) can reach its goal. In ancient India they used to say, "If the priests did not offer sacrifices the sun would not rise." This shows that it is real action, holy, in concurrence with proceeding, with the being of the world. It is not merely action emptied of being, nor voluntarism or merely good intentions. . . .

Orthopraxis does not just mean the ethos of work or of action; it is a different act, deeper, sacral, pregnant with being, liturgical. And this is what really gives value to action.

Imagine what a scare the secretary of this conference would get if, after spending the whole day on the heavy and boring job of compiling the lists of the participants, she was to discover that there was no ink in the printer. The work is the same, but it does not lead to any result. Orthopraxis is not just the movement of the fingers but the real action, together with the ink. Christianity *has* a doctrine; it is an action. It is the salvific action of Christ, which acts and fulfills always. To obtain salvation, man on earth must truly participate and cooperate with the fulfillment of the action of Christ. Eternal life, according to St. John (17:3), consists in knowing Christ, but this knowledge is a doing (Mt 19:17). Even love demands action (Jn 17:15). Without love we cannot know God (Jn 2:3), nor love (1 Jn 2:4; 5:2-3; 2 Jn 6).

To develop this concept here would lead us away from our context. The sense of the sacred has faded somewhat. If, for example, one claims that the church exists because of worship, this is in some way linked to liturgical action, but usually this statement does not get examined in depth. Worship is the pregnant act through which the created one rises up to the Creator. Orthopraxis is not just moralistic behavior; it is the very action on earth that a Christian must participate in, and it requires faith. Christianity is the ontological place where this task is carried out. Orthopraxis makes up the framework for orthodoxy. Within this framework, this action—orthodoxy—fulfills its own authentic meaning. They cobelong to each other. A nonpracticing pagan has no meaning, and even less a nonpracticing Catholic. For example, in India they find it incomprehensible how the West has managed to make a distinction, or rather the division, as in: "I am a Christian, a Catholic, I don't want to deny it and I want to be one, but I don't practice." What can this statement mean other than that orthodoxy has become disconnected from the living link of orthopraxis? Now, you could object that a Christian is not one who considers that the Christian doctrine is true and adheres to everything that the Mother Church and the wise theologians have written and said, but

rather he who believes. Believing means more than just considering something to be true. It means to corealize the act of faith in which it is orthopraxis that has the main role. (This brief description of orthopraxis finishes here, otherwise we will never get to our problem.)

Applications

For our problem there would be the following three applications:

Space for Differences of Opinion

Once the concept of orthodoxy has been understood, it is not my intention to diminish orthodoxy itself or its role through the concept of orthopraxis. Both cobelong to each other, but supremacy is due to orthopraxis (previously we gave various examples). If correctly understood, in my opinion, the concept of orthopraxis opens up a space for differences in opinion. If orthodoxy were identical to Christianity, in the latter there would be no space for those with different conceptions, or for two different theological schools. Either A is right or B is right, only one or the other. If, for example, the essence of the Mass is the offertory, then it cannot be in the transubstantiation. No compromise is possible. Maybe the Church would not want to decide this dispute, but nevertheless either one conception or the other should be the true one. It cannot be both. If orthodoxy were identical to Christianity there would be no room for tolerance—if not for that type of tolerance, which is a tactic, as discussed previously. The most important thing is not the theory about sacrifice but the sacrifice itself.

Space for Heresy

Orthodoxy also leaves space for *differences in faith* by using the historical and highly charged term of "heresy." It is not possible to possess the whole doctrine and at the same time be Christian. If we want to leave aside present-day examples we could consider the dispute of the Donatists. One can live outside of orthodoxy but be within orthopraxis. It must be added that when I use this word, some people could interpret it for their own ends—for example, by thinking that it is not necessary to be orthodox but still be able to live within the bosom of existential truths. Yet in the moment that he becomes aware of this, he consequently eliminates orthodoxy as something difficult to bear and also loses orthopraxis, which is the essential conclusion to the act of faith. The principle is no longer valid with self-consciousness. I cannot allow myself a whole series of different ideas and nevertheless attain my goal. If I speak from an external point of view I can claim: it is possible to live within orthopraxis for those who, despite finding themselves outside orthodoxy, are not aware of it and thus not only attain their goal in the bosom of orthopraxis but also contribute to causing, saving, and implementing it. One can in fact talk to these people until one touches them in their innocence. Thus one can speak of a sphere, which is sacrally internal to Christianity.

Space for Unbelief

The third application also gives space to *non-Christians*, believers in other faiths, or, if you wish, unbelievers.

Orthopraxis in no way means decorous or perfect behavior. Instead it means that practice, that action, allow Man to reach his goal. Christians are not only those of the right faith but also those who hope and love. It is possible to attain one's own salvation outside of orthodoxy, and maybe this is the normal path for the majority of humanity.

Despite being on the right path, we do not follow the right doctrine; this has actually always been the opinion of the Church, according to which one cannot attain salvation without grace but in any case grace also operates outside of the Church itself. The consequences for the justification and the right use of tolerance are now obvious and bring us to the third part of our talk (which I must briefly summarize as my time has almost run out): *the tolerance of Christian men.*

The Concept of Christian Tolerance

We will now speak about the Christian man's tolerance because we wish to acquire a more positive meaning for Christian tolerance.

Tolerance as a Virtue

Tolerance is a virtue, not a lesser evil or an intelligent or astute adaptation to circumstance; better still, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (according to Gal 5:22).

This tolerance presents three aspects.

1. *Discrimination.* One is discrimination, discernment, not only between good and evil but also between the definite and the provisional, between formulations, teachings, and the *res significata*, the thing in itself, between intentionality and understanding and so on.

When, in 1956, the twenty-five hundredth anniversary of Buddhism was celebrated, the dean of my faculty of Indiology found himself in the chair at a Buddhist congress. When he spotted me at the entrance he bantered, "What are you doing here? You're certainly not a Buddhist!"—to which I replied, "What are you doing here? You're not a Buddhist either," and he replied, "I am a Buddhist!" so I said, "I am also a Buddhist. I am according to the same rights and reasons that you appeal to when you define yourself as a Buddhist [he is an orthodox Hindū]. In fact you have recognized central truths in Buddhism which allow you to define yourself a Buddhist even without being so on a juridical level." He believed that, unlike him, intentionality would not have been enough for me. Yet it is just that intentionality, that discrimination, which helps us not to be embarrassed by mere words.

Here one could apply what has been said about microdoxy.

Only authentic orthodoxy allows us to weigh up this discrimination within the conditioning of philosophy, psychology, culture, history, and so on. This intellectual element is necessary if we want to practice the true virtue of tolerance.

Unfortunately we often experience tragic misunderstandings. Not only the Christological and Trinitarian disputes of the early Christian centuries serve as an example; today there are many similar misunderstandings. The same reasons (and now you can understand what happened at the Buddhist congress), to which, for example, the Christian West and its theology refer to when considering God as a person without falling into anthropomorphism, are used by the Hindū Vedānta school to deny that God has a personality. When one claims that the main obstacle of Hinduism toward Christianity is that Hinduism does not recognize the personality of God, all intentionality is lost, for otherwise *almost* the same thing would be understood despite using opposite words. (I say *almost* so as to leave the Trinitarian question open.)

2. *Hierarchical consciousness.* The second element corresponds to a hierarchical awareness. True tolerance must not only make distinctions (first element), but also connections. These connections must find their place in a hierarchical structure. It's not just a matter of connections between the essential and the nonessential but also between the more and the

less, between the whole and the parts, between the office and the representative, the authority and the subjects. At this point I do not want to go further into this question.

3. *Receptive attitude.* The third and essential element, the specific moment that leads to the final part of my paper, is the receptive attitude. What I mean by this is that we are so unaccustomed to the contemplative dimension that this conclusion may seem a little strange. According to a Malabar saying, when an ant pulls an elephant toward himself with a rope, it is not the elephant that goes toward the ant but the ant that goes toward the elephant. When a Christian tolerates, when a son of God takes on something and supports it, he does not give in or compromise, and it is the other who becomes involved, bound, and obliged to cooperate.

The tolerance of Christian men is not turning a blind eye in deference to a liberalistic and optimistic view of the world; it is not an astute measure of adaptation, the choice of the lesser evil, or giving way to the inessential. It is completely different in that it is tolerating, suffering, enduring, supporting—in other words, bearing. In today's epistle, the Latin liturgy also says, "Bear everything in the name of the elect" (2 Tim 2:10). Furthermore, Christian tolerance is taking on, welcoming, redeeming, a transformation that permits resurrection. It is a virtue, as claimed in Galatians 5:22, a *mystical virtue* and not just a passive attitude. It means accepting and taking on to redeem—a welcoming to transform and, maybe, a death so as to resurrect. As you see, it is specific.

What Must a Christian Tolerate?

Evil. Although this is certainly true, first, it is a big and abstract word, and second, we should not be sure of expressing a correct judgment. Third, this is not all. What must a Christian tolerate? Quite simply, he must tolerate the world. A Christian must tolerate the world starting from himself. He must tolerate that he *is not yet*, that he is not how he would like to be, that he has not yet attained the goal: the perfection of his own being. He must tolerate that he cannot become perfect in twenty-four hours and that he cannot be a saint. Not only must he tolerate the fact that he is a sinner but also that the kingdom of God permits violence, which has not yet begun, and that everything takes place among shadows and reflections.

How can he grant himself such tolerance? First, only he who has this basic attitude of faith: he tolerates himself in all his inadequacy, and through his temporary existence also supports that of the other. He must tolerate the weight of the other and the nature of both his moral and his ontic insufficiency. He must tolerate this unfinished cosmos, this fragile and shattered temporality. He who is satisfied and consequently no longer receptive, he who is not able to learn, who does not feel he is a pilgrim and regrets this, cannot be tolerant. He cannot allow himself this tolerance and cannot even understand what I am saying.

So how should a Christian behave? This is my second question in this description of the third element of the virtue of tolerance. He must really act in tolerance and prove himself to be tolerant. And this means that a Christian is not simply one who endures sinners and nonbelievers, he supports them. A Christian upholds and supports the world. He can carry out this task only in Christ and with Christ, the Lord, Creator and Redemer of the world. This supporting is the central task of orthopraxis. A Christian is neither the judge of the world nor a spectator or an essence who keeps correct vision to himself. He has something to do on earth; he has been entrusted with a task. His faith is imperfect, dead, devoid of hope and love, and as a Christian he must carry out a constituent task, a holy, liturgical, and sacral action—therefore a sacerdotal task. He contributes to the work, the sacrifice, and

the redemption. A Christian is effectively a priest of humanity and the entire cosmos. He must perform a cosmic role in the formation of the new heaven and the new earth. This role corresponds to tolerance, which can be translated into patience. By the way, this translation is not original. At least on one occasion, *hyponome* in the Vulgate was not translated as *patience* (*patientia*), but as *tolerantia* (2 Chr 1:6). Tolerance is that patience with which we will save our souls and those of the others (Lk 21:19); *tolerantia*, which means hope and expectation, not just perseverance and steadfastness. Christian, biblical tolerance has often been translated only with perseverance and steadfastness; to my mind this interpretation is too stoic. In fact, Christian tolerance also means to hold and support the burden of the other, his neighbor's load which is an act through which (according to Paul, Gal 6:2) Christians observe the law of Christ. This is a Christian's duty. To edify is not pure Christendom, powerful on earth and victorious in the world, but rather it is the kingdom of God. Naturally this means also to build the matter for resurrection on earth, even in the smallest structures—so that the new heaven and the new earth may commence.

To be the light and the yeast of the world, this is a Christian's duty. This should all be considered very seriously, not only as a sort of contemplation for the pious, but rather as a constituent task of being Christian, if he wants to go by that name. If he does not support and sustain his cross (and his cross means this small part of the world that has been entrusted to him as a good servant), he cannot be a disciple of Christ.

Considerations on Numerical Data

To make all this even clearer I wish to make a brief numerical consideration that may complete the picture of our reflections for those who find the thoughts presented somewhat abstract. This numerical data refers to Catholics, but if it referred to all Christians it would not differ much. Today the number of Catholics corresponds to about 20 percent of the world population. In 2000 they will only represent 9 percent, while the whole of Christendom maybe 11 percent or 13 percent. However, out of this number only a fifth are practicing. This means that today 4 percent of the world population is made up of practicing Catholics, and by the year 2000 there will be no more than 2 percent practicing the salvific ministry of the Church—to be exact, 1.8 percent. Further evidence is that half the population of Africa is less than twenty years old, and 20 percent of the population of Germany is of pensionable age. The growth of the Asian population is three times that of Europe and North America put together. In 1980 there will be 1 billion Chinese. Over the last hundred years the increase in Christians only corresponded to the biological growth of the world population. Indeed, over the last hundred years, from a sociological point of view, there have been no conversion movements and numbers have actually decreased, as usually the apostates are not counted. There is nothing new about this; it has always been this way. America existed prior to Columbus.

Christian duty is not to dominate and neither, I would like to add to make my meaning clear, is it to convert as is generally understood. Rather it is that of redemption, of co-redemption. In this way tolerance has a primary role. A Christian is he who contributes to carrying the burdens of the world, to redeeming it while tolerating it. He saves the world with Christ, hidden in God. Christian tolerance is exactly this huge virtue of taking-upon-himself, to transform the world with Christ, that is, to redeem it.

Consequences

Below are only three of the consequences that arise from these considerations:

The Consciousness of Easter

The first is awareness of victorious tolerance. It is truly original Christian tolerance (or at least so it seems to me), which allows us to achieve that victorious consciousness of the Easter of Christians and Christendom once again. It is the exact opposite of the attitude that Professor Karl Rahner would maybe call a crypto-heresy, that silent feeling that this creation has gone wrong for the good Lord and that what Genesis, with obvious optimism, describes as actually *very* good is not exact. Therefore, we good Christians must nervously make haste to protect the world in some manner. In fact, if we only want to work with natural concepts, we become fewer and fewer each year; we are of less consequence in the world and end up by developing inferiority complexes. All the more reason why God's creation has gone wrong (thinks the good Christian); he must have miscalculated somewhere. However, regarding redemption (which is indisputable), it is just a simple catastrophe. It has simply misfired and that *mirabilis reformasti* or that *felix culpa* of the Latin liturgy are merely the explosions of pious souls with no connection to reality. Thus it is we, the pious, well-intentioned Christians, who must make an effort to restore at least a little order and patch up the work of God as best we can. This also explains the tensions in the missions that are making no progress at all. No! When a Christian tolerates, he triumphs. When he suffers the world, the world rules. That wonderful dispute between Abraham and Jehovah in which first fifty, then forty-five, then forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten righteous people would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction, is not just an arbitrary taking or leaving by the Lord God, because that handful of righteous people carried more ontological weight than the sinfulness of the two cities.

There is no other Christian method. The true disciple will do better than the master.

Contemplation

The second consequence would be an explanation for balanced and peaceful Christian contemplation, Christian elegance without the restlessness of action, the frenzy of activism or the paternalism of philanthropy. Being seized by true reality (only in accessible faith) and the "wonderful works of God," of which we spoke at the beginning, is the authentic fruit of real tolerance. What one has to *do* is not to directly convert all the others or make our action depend on optimal external circumstances; nor is it to wait until circumstances are favorable or complain because we no longer possess an empire, an authority, a real family, and have lost everything. No, it is to endure the situation in the love of God and the patience of Christ (2 Th 3:5) and through this to contribute to redemption. This is an appeal to all in that he who does not cooperate, who does not contribute or endure, he who really does not practice this authentic Christian tolerance, is a traitor.

Ecumenical Ecumenism

Third and last, the consequence of Christian tolerance is the creation of true relationships with the non-Christian religions. It appears to me that that tolerance really has a role to play in this regard. Here again it is a question of forbearance, of tolerance as we understand it, of bearing and forbearing, of receptiveness. Although it sounds a trifle pompous, I would like to use the term "ecumenical ecumenism," within which this wonderful movement of our

times could even spread to the other religions of the world. Seen from the outside it is in fact interesting to observe, without belittling, that the problems within Christianity seem a bit like family disputes and, through an ecumenical ecumenism, like discussions of the Christian ecumene. This universal ecumenism will not only give us a sense of proportion but will also foster a certain ease. Those who are stronger will be able to tolerate and carry the load and therefore redeem without well-intentioned concessions that obscure the real relationship. Yes, Christian tolerance is a difficult task. It requires faith, hope, love, and a personal, sociological, cosmic, and even mystical virtue. As the Gospels say, it is good for you that I leave, despite the fact that you now have to temporarily bear the world.

THE INTERPELLATION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Catholic Theology of the Third Millennium

Blessed are those who love Justice—which should not be identified with the Law (Rom 3:21). We have been so indoctrinated, or maybe I should say colonized, over the past two millennia that we cannot even imagine a way of being Catholic that does not keep to the Semitic-Greek categories and the Latin language of these past millennia—even if German or Bantu are spoken within the same Christianity.

I would like to first state that the point of view adopted is that of this religion, and not to betray the self-denomination of Catholic, which for me is synonymous with Christian, is like undergoing labor pains.

There is no doubt that in recent times, since the Middle Ages, we have taken huge strides toward opening to others but we are still afraid of the evangelical *duc in altum* (Put out into the deep: εἰς τὸ βάθος), and we also fear that we will not be able to find a way out if we abandon the Greek-Semitic culture of the last millennia. Yet again we find ourselves devoid of categories and we are obsessed with security: we still find it difficult to get used to the “freedom of the children of God,” which refers not only to practice but also to theory. We can only be glad and experience this freedom if our heart is pure. Then fear automatically disappears.

Having heard a lot of talk about the “de-Christianization of society,” I ask myself, “Has not Christianity also de-Christianized itself? Could it not be that despite the ongoing protests against ‘privatization,’ unjust no matter what, we have privatized faith?”

I would like to add by way of explanation that the brief references to other traditions are not erudite clarifications but examples that aim to illustrate that today, even for the understanding of one’s own tradition, the intuitions of others are pretty indispensable. We need each other.

Interpellation

Interpellation incites and “stimulates” us (as the Indo-European root suggests) toward a radical conversion if we hope to be true to the Christian message when faced with an almost bimillennial tradition. And conversions are always risky. They imply the risk of alienation (which can only be overcome by mysticism). However, the historical conjuncture Man has reached demands magnanimity both in being and in thought: μακρο-εὐνοησις or, simply, *mahātmya*, as the Greeks and Indians would say. Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?

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Almost half a century ago I dared to ask myself whether, to be a conscientious Christian, I needed to be spiritually Semitic and intellectually Hellenic, and so I asked Pope Paul VI. I believe that Christianity *subsistit* in the Church (Vatican II), but the phrase cannot be inverted if by "Church" one only means an organization or a doctrinal system. Philosophy, by which I mean complete and not merely logical *thinking*, has helped me to understand those who think differently than me (who are not of the same opinion), discovering that error is a truth that one abuses, usually extrapolating it. Thus I understood this said extrapolation, seeing that, according to the same tradition, those who have reached the "use of reason" could discover the Truth, at least implicitly, and live accordingly without calling it Christian. St. Thomas affirms this quite explicitly at the beginning of his *Summa theologiae*, adding that as the salvific life is superior to reason, "*necessarium fuit*" that Man should receive a "divine revelation" (and therefore from the Christian Scriptures that did not exist and were unknown). Everything was consistent: there is a "real light which enlightens every man coming into the world" (Jn 1:9).

I could illustrate this theme (but without explaining it adequately), by saying something like this: after two millennia of Christianity imbued with the Semitic spirit, with a Greek mind-set and the Roman genius (and I say this with admiration and without irony), the time has come, if we claim to be "Catholics," to accept the interpellation of the other cultures and open ourselves to all the areas of the world that are not part of the Abrahamic cultural current. After the enthusiasm of the Vatican II and the voices that subsequently called for a Vatican III, I had hoped for a Jerusalem II, as a symbol of openness toward the other world religions. This was because during Jerusalem I (Acts 15:1–21) the Pact of Jehovah with his people, symbolized by the sacrament of circumcision, was considered to be superseded (not negated), and the message of Christ opened toward what has abusively been called the "Third World," represented by two-thirds of humanity. The apostles, all of them Jews, had the courage to accept that the kingdom of God would have been taken away from them (Mt 21:43). Today we are beginning to realize this, even if more slowly and less perfectly. It is not a question of sweetening the "scandal of the Cross" (Gal 5:11) by reducing Christianity to a natural morality, but rather to apply it to ourselves and not to use it merely as an exportation product for others.

The thesis that I upheld at the time did not claim that "salvation," to use a Christian term, is to be found in "believing" in Jesus of Nazareth. Rather it is found in "faith," in that Mystery that St. John called *logos*, the Vedas *vāc*, the Chinese *Tao* . . . ("homeomorphic equivalents"); Christians recognize this in Jesus the Christ although it is not identical to him; however, it is inseparable from Jesus, who is the Incarnation of what in many other religions is called God. This statement does not intend to diminish the singularity of Jesus, which for some is more human than divine and for others more divine than human—thus becoming completely God (only credible if God is the Trinity) and fully Man (acceptable only if Man is more than a simple rational biped). The unity of Christ is not the integration between two natures unless one distorts what Greece meant by *ϑεως*, which would be the beginning of the "de-hellenization" of Christianity. But this is not my theme here. Just as with the Trinity, one must think in a less dialectical, I would almost dare to say contemplative (mystical), manner. Reality must be approached simultaneously with the three eyes: that of the senses, of the mind, and of faith, *experiendo, raziocinando, credendo*, as Riccardo di San Vittore (*De Trinitate* I:1 [Ps 891A]) says (among others). Many traditions talk about this, including Christianity, saving themselves from the reductionism of limiting human consciousness to rationality, while avoiding irrationality, which would merely be a dialectical conclusion. Human knowledge embraces much more than just rational understanding, which would be the *oculus mentis*, as the Christian tradition says, echoing distant Ciceronian usage.

Here we come to the central point of *interpellation*. Neither sensory nor rational knowledge and still less the knowledge of faith is a Christian monopoly. Cultures cannot be reduced to different human customs: they are not "folklore." Cultures reveal different ways of thinking, of seeing the world and living in it—that is to say, of approaching reality humanly so as to reach the truth, which does not exclude the possibility of error, even if the criterion is not our *concept* of truth but that which we create with the symbol of Reality. We do not reduce truth to rational understanding, which, however, does not mean that there cannot be communication (and communion) among different ways of thinking.

The capital importance of dialogue, which is the theme of the *intercultural philosophy*, follows here. Human beings are dialogical; in other words, they transcend *logos*.

To be brief we will give only one, though fundamental, example of intercultural interpellation: *time* as a constituting symbol of what is real and therefore the fundamental role of history in many cultures, especially Western cultures. Something historical, something that has happened over time (identified as historical time) is equal to something real and thus true. In another context I have recounted an incident that I witnessed at Vṛndāvana, the "historical" homeland of Kṛṣṇa. A Protestant pastor pointed out in a jokey and friendly way to a follower of Vaishnava that the legends about Kṛṣṇa were not exactly edifying, but that this was not particularly important (essential) if one bore in mind that it is not possible to prove the existence of Kṛṣṇa; in other words, he was not even a historical character, not even real. The pastor compared Kṛṣṇa with Jesus of Nazareth; there is no doubt about the historical, therefore real, existence of the latter. I was a little uncomfortable, but my friend who believed in Kṛṣṇa seemed quite happy and in agreement with everything. He understood that Jesus was a very important historical character, like Akbar or Gandhi, but that instead his Kṛṣṇa, that of his heart and his faith, was far more real and transcendent than any historical hero of the past or the future. I made no comment, but at that point I understood the importance of the resurrection about which the exegetes had racked their brains to find out if it had been "historical" or not, once again identifying reality with history. This example is quite important. We should not identify faith with its interpretation (belief).

The question of the historical Jesus (identified with the real Jesus) is not of much importance for most of Asian thought as it does not live in the *mythos* of history and does not represent the only criteria for reality.

Leaving aside further philosophical quibbles, it is obvious that, if eternity is real, it does not come *after* time (which is already a temporal concept). Eternal life (ζωή) is not the everlasting βίος. *Interpellation*, in a word, is of no small importance. However, it is not limited to this, as we will see with another example that is also more central to Christianity: the question of God.

Theo(logy)

The majority of theologians, even if they define themselves as Christians, are in fact monotheists, as if the Trinity did not exist or were merely a divine "revelation" to humiliate our minds, with no further transcendence for theology or, in the end, for our life. The *Theos* of theology is, however, monotheistic—even if it pays verbal tribute to the Trinity. Nowadays theology, especially official theology, has not yet crossed the Rubicon or the Amazon River.

In a comment on Vatican II, Cardinal Lehmann noted, both acutely and in depth, that the "question of God" has transformed itself into the central problem

of Christianity and added that it was a question of "continuing to search for the face of the living God."

It is not a matter of absolutizing anything (the face of God also depends on our viewpoint), but only of relativizing all the doctrines starting with the present one, without, however, confusing relativity with relativism. The Church itself has in fact changed its opinion. I would suggest that the skeptics read the Acts of the Councils, including the ecumenical ones, in which "truths" that contemporary consciousness cannot accept are defended. Truth always relates to the intellect. To understand a *text* it must be located in a *context* and one must know the *pretext*.

It is both risky and difficult to criticize such a deep-rooted, fecund, and profound millenary credo in a few lines. Nevertheless, the fact that somebody must have the audacity and humility to act as spokesperson for those who have no voice—in this case not only the economically poor but also the peoples culturally outcast by what goes by the name of the First World—is in my favor.

Still less do I want to comment on the both logical and methodological error of accusing many of the religions, which are defined as such, of being polytheistic. This would be a logical error because the *Theos* that monotheism claims is One is not the *Theos* that polytheism considers to be multiple. These two statements do not refer to the same reality; they do not have the same predicate. It is thus a methodological error to judge an intercultural problem from a monocultural point of view (and in this case from monotheism). It is easier to criticize polytheism from monotheistic premises. The problem lies in who "God" is.

Besides the political reasons (in the best sense of the word) for which monotheism encouraged the fact that after Constantine the Christian Church could better and more rationally justify its dominion and influence over the world at the time, with Constantine and what followed, the "reason of state" insinuated itself into theological thought. Rational thought is a great ally of monotheism as it justifies the reduction *ad unum* necessary for rationality. *Mens plura in unum cogit, unde eligere possit* (the mind reduces plurality to a single unit so as to be able to choose), as Varro had said, shortly before having informed us that "cogitare a cogendo dictum" (*cogitare* derives from *compel*): to compel reality to adapt to our rational way of thought. Monotheism gives us security because it compels reality to comply with its rational intelligibility, reducing it to a unit. Only dialectical thought "thinks" that the only alternative to the unit is plurality: either monotheism or polytheism—both are incompatible with the Incarnation—it is neither the one nor the other.

The challenge of monotheism is the following: God is not a Being (or a Supreme Substance), nor does monotheism respond to the deep intuition of thought of the majority of the peoples of the earth who are not interested in the idea of an absolute transcendence. On the other hand, the Trinity tells us that the divine Mystery is a relationship in which both Man and the Cosmos are to be found—in what I have called *cosmotheandric* intuition.¹ We should not forget that in the Trinity, as in cosmotheandric vision, no trio exists outside of our mental abstraction—as St. Augustine said when he laconically wrote that the Trinity *qui incipit numerare incipit errare* (he who starts to count starts to go wrong). What we have commonly come to call "theology" has ended up almost exclusively as a reasoned speculation on the divine mystery, postulated as One because that is what reason demands, ignoring the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas, in the third question of his *Summa*, states that God is not merely substance.

¹ See *La intuición cosmotheandrica* (Madrid: Trotta, 1999) and, more complete, *La realidad cosmotheandrica* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2004).

I repeat that the Trinity reveals that God is pure relationship, and that the opposite would be tritheism.² The revolutionary dogma of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception declaring her to be the mother of God (θεοτοκος), without human intervention, destroys all monotheistic theories. The monotheistic God cannot have a mother, otherwise Christ cannot fully be God—unless we transform him into a schizophrenic character (cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzger §564, etc.). Popular Marian devotion (beyond the superstitions surrounding it) is a lesson to us.

The reductionism of translating *logos* as reason is also well known. According to more traditional theology, theology is, above all, "science"—*gnosis*, or, more clearly, knowledge of faith (subjective genitive)—and this knowledge, although it is not irrational, cannot be reduced to mere reason. *Logos* is basically a word that implies someone is speaking, someone who is being spoken to, a meaning and a sound; this cannot just be reduced to reason. Furthermore, a Christian theology cannot ignore the Spirit that is not subordinated to *logos*. Classical Russian theosophy already underlines this mystery, but this Catholic knowledge, which could also be called "theology" if we were not to compartmentalize the Trinity, is still at gestation phase. Other world religions could also collaborate.

We have already mentioned the traditional idea of the three eyes as symbols of the threefold human knowledge. One can infer that knowledge cannot be reduced to mere logical intelligibility. Faith is also knowledge, *gnosis*, in its deepest meaning. Faith is authentic knowledge even if it is not rational knowledge (but nevertheless is not irrational). An element of doubt exists in every faith, seeing as faith is never rationally apodictic.

On the other hand, theology and anthropology are not inseparable. The Delphic Sybil tells us that self-knowledge is not just an individualistic *autos*, as is recognized by almost all the traditions of humanity. The Christian message tells us that Christ is *fully* God and *fully* Man as, potentially, all of us. "You are God," and "God is everything in all of us" (πάντα ἐν πασιν), are expressions from the Christian Scriptures that are incompatible with monotheism. "God who has been seen by nobody" can be glimpsed in Man, in his image. Christ Himself says that "He who has seen me has seen the Father." From this point of view the Hindū Advaita intuition of *brahman* and *ātman* is revealing.³ However, to clarify this experience, we must overcome "logomonism."

We could also exegetically base ourselves on the double direction of the phrase in the first chapter of the Bible: "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (κατ'εἰκονα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ'ομοιωσιν). As Man is an icon and the portrait of God, we must observe man who is made in his image and likeness, to know who God is. To put it more clearly we must know Man to know who God is. It should be underlined that, despite subsequent patriarchalism, Genesis itself explains that both male and female were created, so to know the divine image we should not and cannot only look at the male but rather at Man in his complete androgyny. Notwithstanding the subsequent use of the word "Father," which appears to give preeminence to the male, the word "man" does not only refer to the male, who has no right to monopolize it. The word "Father" is grammatically of the male gender but does not refer to the male sex but, rather, as more than one Council of Toledo says (cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzger §568), it refers to the "totius fons et origo divinitatis" (source and origin of all Divinity), which I have permitted myself to translate as the source and origin of all Reality.

This brings us to the next point.

² See *La Trinidad. Un'esperienza umana primordiale* (Madrid: Siruela, 1998); Italian edition: *Trinità ed esperienza religiosa dell'uomo* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1989).

³ See *The Vedic Experience*, new ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001), 641–78; Italian edition: *I Veda*, 3rd ed. (Milan: Rizzoli, 2005).

Catholic (Theology)

Christianity has and still claims to incarnate a universal religion—that is, catholic—not so much in the geographical sense of a more restricted earth (γη), which it was at the beginning, but insofar as it represents a liberating announcement for all men (ευαγγελιον). This claim has been almost automatically repeated under the heading, interpreted uncritically, and literally, of one flock with one shepherd (Jn 10:16). It is further strengthened by the monotheism of a God as Judge, who seems to forget that he makes the sun rise on the good and the bad alike and sends the rain both to the honest and the dishonest (Mt 5:45). Today, when giving their blessing to the whole world, popes still use the Roman Imperial formula *urbi et orbi*.

We have just said that catholicity cannot be *geographical*, but neither can it be interpreted as if it were a matter of a mere *organization* (which has to have its limits). This was the deep meaning of the symbol "God" as a universal name, even if it was only *common* to the Indo-European family and means to shine, sky, dawn (*diva, devah, dyads, dies, Zeus, Jupiter . . .*) or simply "light," as St. John says in his first epistle. The name "Christ" is also generic and means "anointed." If Christ were exclusively an individual, He could *really* be neither present in the Eucharist nor identify with the destitute.

Nor should catholicity be interpreted as universal *jurisdiction*, which was how the popes justified the conquest of the Americas. We should be aware that the symbiosis between the Jewish Torah and Roman juridical genius ontologized the law to the point of recognizing the existence of a divine law and, consequently, of a God as Legislator (even managing to justify the death penalty). Furthermore we should also—and I note it as a phenomenological reflection—be aware that in the eyes of other religions this is an aberration.

On the other hand, catholicity is not even an *abstract* name representing only a generic concept, including different and more or less analogous species. The Porphyrian Tree is of no use to us. And here the interpellation of the third millennium presents itself again and also concerns the philosophy and the mind-set of the dominant culture. The "Imitation of Christ," which at one time was popular, should not be interpreted, for example, as the mimicry of another individual, of an extraneous and transcending *alius*. It can also be seen as our identification with an *alter*, the *altera pars* of ourselves, which we have not yet attained because we are on a pilgrimage toward our own fullness. To give two examples, both the Hindū "realization" and Christian "divinization" consist in this, but they do not mean alienation, to be what one is not, but to reach what we potentially are. What is catholic cannot be what is *particular* but neither what is *abstract* (which has no life). The ancients already spoke of the "specular" nature of knowledge and of Man as a "microcosm." The destiny of the universe is reflected in each of us, and we can contribute to it. Here lie the dignity and the responsibility of men. In 1947, shortly before his death, Mahātmā Gandhi said that when one person does good the whole universe is privy to that good.⁴

It is in catholicity that the *κενωσις* appears to be essential, the emptying of Christ who can be universal because he is devoid of all qualifications (just as God cannot be qualified). It is a sign of wisdom to be able to discover the universal in the concrete, but without identifying them. In this connection the contribution of Buddhism with its reflection on the void (*śūnyatā*) is of capital importance.

In the fifth place, it is not a matter of interpreting the message of Christ as the bearer of a *universal doctrine* either. Every doctrine, like any other conceptual content, depends on the context in which it has been conceived (*conceptus*), which, in turn, depends on the culture

⁴ See *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958–1984), 88:230.

and the specific premises (details) that give it meaning and that can only be universalized if one starts with already (previously) accepted axioms. This is the strength and the weakness of monotheism that starts with rational evidence that it considers as universal, both forgetting the divine ineffability and demanding absolute transcendence—which would oblige us to be silent. We should not forget that the words that each human being is forced to use cannot be reduced to mere concepts. Words are symbols, and symbols are always relationships. Therefore, oral culture cannot completely replace written culture. This is sometimes ignored by a certain type of rationalism.

In short, the claim of catholicity on the part of Christian theology can be neither abstract nor doctrinal. This is what has been traditionally understood when one states that theology is intellectus *fidei*, intellection of faith, as in Jesus's phrase related by the three Synoptic Gospels (and then discussed again by St. Paul): "It is given for you to know the secrets (γινῶναι τὰ μυστήρια) of the kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 13:11; Lk 8:10. Mk 4:11 simply says, "given"). Faith is knowledge, as the tradition has maintained, even if it is not "clear and precise knowledge," but experiential knowledge that we interpret according to our cultural and historical parameters, passing from *faith* to *belief*. Faith is an existential dimension of human beings. Every man has faith, as he is aware that he does not know everything, of his ignorance, and that there is an unknown person who surpasses him. When saying "knowledge" we obviously refer to real knowledge, that is, the personal rather than the abstract concept of knowledge. For twenty-one centuries this has been the subject of confusion (Parmenides) that has become endemic in the postmedieval culture of the West, to then be "corrected" by the extreme opposite of nominalism. In theological terms faith does not have an object (*objectum*) as the Christian tradition states when defining it as a theological virtue, referring to a God whom "no one has ever known" (Jn 1:18). Insofar as we are rational beings, we are without doubt aware of this and we interpret it according to our cultural parameters. This is belief. In philosophical terms, a transcendental relationship exists between faith and belief. Any faith expresses itself through a credo even if the opposite is not possible just for reason (without the help of faith), as asserted by Catholic theology. Sometimes we tragically forget that when a so-called believer debates with a so-called nonbeliever, they are not talking about the same "thing." Intercultural dialogue, I repeat, is not a dialectical discussion—which starts with a common point of reference. The common point of reference is actually found in dialogical dialogue.

This is a crucial point and often misunderstood by "ecumenical ecumenism," as I have defined it, or more simply by interreligious dialogue.

A few examples will save us from a technically philosophical explanation. Hinduism, among the other religions, offers another version of what "catholic" means. Hinduism also claims to be universal or, in its own language, *sanātana dharma*; this means infinite *dharma*, without end, even if the consciously universalistic exegesis of this expression from the *Mahābhārata* comes much later; before, it was taken for granted that one thought in compartments (*componendo et dividendo*, says St. Thomas Aquinas). This is why it is said that Hinduism does not have a founder and for the same reason does not even have a specific doctrine. Hinduism is an existential attitude more than a conceptual content. To say, "Hindu *dharma*," is little less than a tautology because *dharma* means cosmic order, duty, morality, law, justice, rights, virtue—that which holds the universe together. . . . It is similar to when Islam claims that every man is born a Muslim and that, at a later stage, it is society that confers "another" religious affiliation. Sufism "has existed since the beginning," says a venerated master (Hazrat Inayat Khan), "because man possesses the light which is his second nature." Something similar could be said of the *Tao* of many African religions (cf. the wide-reaching

notion of *ubuntu*). The difficulty lies in attaining harmony between the concrete and the universal, something that becomes harder because of the institutionalization of many religions that assert their identity through differentiation.

The task is both delicate and of great importance. It is not a question of defending a syncretism in which everything is mixed together or a relativism where everything is the same as everything else. We are concrete beings and we cannot confuse one thing with another or claim, without contradicting ourselves, that all doctrines (advocating different convictions) are the same. It follows that mysticism or the classical vision of the third eye is essential to faith—which has no object (that would be idolatry)—and which we have already said is different from belief (which does have an object). So we come to the end of our meditation.

The Third Millennium

It is significant that monotheistic religions reject this chronology of Christian origins and that the other nonmonotheistic religions accept it peacefully because they do not interpret it as the "history of salvation," but rather as a practical way of dividing the temporal sequence of events without transcendental meaning.

What these cultures interpret as a symptom of colonialism is the expression of "God's People," used to replace the reductionist expression of "Church," forgetting that originally "Church" represented the mystery of the world (το μυστήριον του κόσμου) since the beginning, as Patrology says explicitly.⁵ The whole of humanity are "God's People," and they are on a pilgrimage.

It could be said that the Council did not mean to diminish the Mystery, but rather to liberate the "Church-institution" from its monopoly over salvation and to universalize it. However, archetypes are traitors. For the Fathers of the Council the expression was liberating, first because they principally put the monotheistic religions at the center, and then because they interpreted "God" as a universal symbol. Thus they ignored religions like Jainism and Buddhism, among others, or, even more seriously, neglected the great Western and Eastern Atheist traditions. It is significant that betrayal and tradition derive from the same Latin word, *tradere*. There is nothing easier than to betray tradition when one does not change it during transmission and wants to keep it unchanged.

As we have just said, the expression of the third millennium is purely pragmatic, and neither does it absolutize time and nor does it have historical value, according to a Semitic concept of history. "History" is not synonymous to time and still less to human time. In the same Christian concept, salvation has a place in history, but it is not a historical fact—on the contrary, it eludes history. Eternity is not history. A more catholic experience would have saved us many arguments.

Certainly, a sort of contemporaneity that all of humanity participates in does exist. We live in the present even if we have different perceptions of what the future and past are. Time is a dimension experienced by all beings and not a freeway toward a destination (the nature of which is a matter of debate). As I have stated, the "theological" virtue of hope is not of the future but of the invisible, there where the "kingdom of God" is, to use evangelical terms. I would venture to say that without this experience, one cannot be happy, seeing as the historical tragedies of the world cannot leave us untouched; it would be an inhuman *ataraxia*.

We are touching a nerve center of Catholic theology of the third millennium that cannot continue frozen in the Semitic cultures (monotheist, historical, with God as legislator and

⁵ See the fundamental work of H. de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Eglise* (Paris: Aubier, 1959).

judge) according to a concept of linear time (thus of an "everlasting life"). We need a new cosmology and a new pluralism. We should not forget that the foundation of pluralism is the experience of human contingency.

In a word, present theology, as a work of faith, "cannot live on its reputation," and to be able to be Catholic, it must be fecundated by the other religions of the planet. We could turn this statement around and say that catholicity does not belong to anyone. We must free ourselves from the inertia of history: "No one who sets his hand to the plow and then keeps looking back" (Lk 9:62).

SOME NOTES ON SYNCRETISM AND ECLECTICISM

Related to the Growth of Human Consciousness

Terminological Introduction

The Ontonomy of Words

Words have life of their own; they change their meaning with time, are subjected to the biological phenomena of youth, aging, and death—even resurrection—and embody the corporate or personal life of man in a proper *ontonomic* way. The relation between Man and word is not a *heteronomous* relation as if words were mere instruments men can use as they wish in order to designate "things" or states of consciousness. The Man-word relation is not an *autonomous* relation either, as if words could, independently of Man and of the use Man makes of them, have a totally disconnected existence. Between Man and word there is a *sui generis* ontonomous relationship that springs from the very nature of the two and connects them intrinsically.

An old word may not be so aggressive as a younger one, a translated word may have lost much of the vigor of the original, and resurrected words may not exactly express what they did in their previous lives. Yet words by themselves have an inherent power, and in spite of their vicissitudes and in spite of their analogical and even equivocal use they keep a certain link between all their meanings that defies the exigencies of the *logos*. There is no need of any logical connection between those meanings, for words are not only expressions of the *logos*, they are also manifestations of the *mythos*. Words reveal both the logical and the mythical dimension of Man. But this much must be said only by way of general introduction to our particular case.

Something of this sort is happening to the two learned words given in the title of this paper. Both have been considered to convey meanings varying from the most hideous confusion to the loftiest synthesis. It would be rewarding to study the destiny of these two words in the history of human thought and to detect the implicit assumptions that have led Man to read into these two words such different meanings. The purpose of this essay is to submit a certain proposal for the use of these words that may help us to introduce some clarification in one of the most important challenges of our time: the encounter of religions and cultures.

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Syncretism

The word "syncretism" already reflects an internal ambiguity in the very fact of its often confused etymology since the time of Erasmus. The word seems to come from a rather peculiar origin. According to Plutarch in his *De fraterno amore* 19, it denotes "the union of two (or more) Cretans in order to face a common foe; hence, the term 'συγκρητισμός' syncretism." But given the bad reputation of the inhabitants of Crete (see Titus 1:12), the word could mean either the fraternal and loyal union against a common enemy or the conspiracy of two (or more) "Cretans," that is, liars or bandits', to cheat or exploit a third person or group. In fact, in the popular language, *κρητισμός* means lying, rascality, and so on, and *κρητιζω*, the act of cheating. It is not too surprising, then, that more scholarly minds would have preferred an etymology deriving the word from *κράννυμι*, to mix (and more specifically to mix with a certain balance) and the prefix *σύν*. But if this were the case, as it is with the word *σύγκρασις* (mixture, etc.), the corresponding word should have been *συγκρατισμός*, which does not exist. The correct and more factual (and thus more contingent) etymology suggests also that the union is provisional and momentary, that is, as long as the external menace remains. It is thus superficial.

We have here the following traits: (1) the joining of forces and interests; (2) from people who otherwise were neither united nor friendly to each other; (3) so that, forgetting internal rivalries, they become provisional allies; (4) in order to fight a common enemy or threat.

No wonder, then, in point of fact, that the use of the word through the ages has almost constantly had a pejorative connotation, except when it began to be used as meaning a global and overall view, for example, the "syncretistic" perception of children or when it was used by the defenders of the respective "syncretistic" doctrines of different periods in human thought. The word also made waves for a while during the so-called syncretistic controversy in the eighteenth century and is on its way to a resurrected life in our time when Man is—hopefully—heading toward a more global vision of everything, thanks to an incipient cross-cultural fertilization on a planetarian scale possible for the first time in human history.

The study of the history of religions has shown us that the classical case of the syncretistic Hellenistic period is far from being an exception. Practically all religious traditions of the world present typical examples of syncretistic phenomena, not only in the past but also in the present. This has led historians of religions to have another view of syncretism than the view put forward by mainly Christian theologians, who tended to link syncretism with the dilution of Christianity and the loss of its uniqueness and purity, so that any interaction or intercourse with the non-Christian world would be considered pollution, if not simple idolatry.

We need not enter now into "the underlying assumptions leading to such an opinion, like a certain *forma mentis*, that is, a peculiar structure of thought that considers that identity and affirmation imply exclusion of the other and monopoly of the affirmed value, so that any similarity is felt as a threat to uniqueness, any influence as a negation of (the) originality (of Christian revelation) and the like. It may suffice to state that the facts shown by the history of religions, including the facts of the formation of Christian religion and doctrine, do not corroborate such an opinion. It could also be added that the particular conceptions of uniqueness, revelation, truth, and the like that are seen to be incompatible with syncretism are not the only possible interpretations of those very concepts—not even from a Christian point of view.

Eclecticism

The word *eclecticism* does not present any difficult etymology, for it evidently comes from λέγειν, to gather, select, related to the rich root "leg-" (see *logos*, etc.) and the prefix *ἐκ*-. The meaning seems to be that of a selective opinion formed by picking up certain portions of already existing doctrines. Since Diogenes Laertius (*Proaemium* 21, citing a certain Potamon of Alexandria) to the time of the French and American eclecticism especially, the history of the word is a long and varied one. The underlying problem lies, obviously, in the criterion used for selection, whether there is an inner sense of truth, or an innate pragmatic thrust, or whatever peculiar insight there may be, leading the mind to make the selection.

It is no wonder that a man like Hegel, for instance (*Lessons on the History of Philosophy*), could not let such a word pass without discarding it as not representing the authentic movement of the Spirit: the true synthesis is not a whimsical picking up from heterogeneous elements, nor a concocting of an artificial system but the logical dynamism of the spirit in the process of overcoming the dialectical opposites by a higher synthesis. Victor Cousin can be considered, among modern philosophers, as the one adopting a thematically eclectic philosophy. Eclecticism assumes here an almost democratic conviction that truth lies in the common agreement and in the elimination of all particular discrepancies, so that a universal consensus (even if relative) can be brought about by adopting these incontrovertible ideas that Men hold. There is, of course, another, more aristocratic form of eclecticism that will say it picks up the best of each system so as to offer the cream, so to speak, of the different human experiences. Here the eclectic is not the minimalist but the maximalist—the man of genius who is able to offer a "better" system based on the "best" experiences of mankind.

Syncretism and Eclecticism

Syncretism and *eclecticism* are, then, two vague words, regarded very often as interchangeable, denoting the adoption of a third construct out of elements coming from two or more different, and generally independent, sources. History is a constant witness to the rise and fall of cultures and subcultures, including religious traditions, by way of eclectic and syncretistic influences. Starting both from an etymological and from a historical or cultural viewpoint we have suggested a seminal distinction between these two words, and we would like to propose it as a working hypothesis. We cannot proceed *geometrico modo* with living words; in any case we need to clarify the meaning of words, previously agreeing about the sense in which we want to use them. Otherwise we fall into the worst type of confusion that arises when the misunderstanding is covered up with the cloak of (apparent) understanding.

Semantic Working Hypothesis

A Morphological Perspective

From a *morphological* point of view, with respect to the encounter of cultures and religions, the following principles seem to be plausible:

1. Cultures and religions interact with each other the moment they become aware of their mutual existence. Once this moment arrives, they cannot remain mutually indifferent and in bona fide isolation.
2. The rules of the encounter are given and found in the encounter itself. They cannot be fixed a priori by any of the single parties to the exclusion of the other.

3. The encounter modifies both the parties. It cannot remain at the level of mere tolerance and uninfluenced coexistence. Belligerent or peaceful intercourse is their status. In both cases there is interaction.

A Historical Perspective

From a *historical* point of view, with respect to integrating the lessons of history in a certain anthropological framework, we may venture also the three following statements:

1. There has hardly been any cultural and religious development in history without at least the stimulus of elements coming from external sources.
2. The fecundation brought about by such encounters has, by and large, not been preconceived, programmed, or prearranged. It has been the outcome of an existential situation.
3. The mutual interaction has produced a rupture with tradition. Only at a later stage has this rupture been healed, that is, integrated into a more encompassing cultural unit, which presents both a feature of continuity and another one of discontinuity with respect to the older situation.

Semantic Perspective

From a semantic point of view I would submit the following working hypothesis:

1. *Eclecticism* could be used for expressing the philosophical, religious, or simply human approach, which having (believed to have) discovered a superior criterion of truth, tries to bring together different cultures, religions, or merely doctrines within the respective systems, by means of applying such a criterion (or criteria) and thus building up a more comprehensive and more encompassing worldview. Eclecticism would thus be the generally conscious and programmed word of an individual or a group; it would amount to discovering and applying a criterion of selection, a scale of priorities. It presupposes a transcendent point of reference, that is, an external vantage point from which the different systems can be evaluated.

Within Christendom, a good number of ecumenical efforts today could be considered examples of this attitude, the transcending point here being that of Christ himself and not the perspectives of the different confessions. Eclecticism tends to compare doctrines, and a good deal of what goes today under the name of comparative studies of cultures and religions could also be said to pertain to this approach.

The eclectic method is also generally followed when the so-called primitive religions are approached in a sympathetic manner by the scholar belonging to a so-called superior culture. The scholar wants then to preserve the "best" from the "primitive" forms and integrate those insights into a more "civilized" or "developed" worldview (of his colleagues and neighbors, for instance) with more "primitive" elements. The "good savage" of the Romantics could be another instructive example.

Further, we may add from a phenomenological viewpoint that the criterion for a valid eclectic synthesis is that the vantage point be not outside of or foreign to the two related systems but at the acknowledged top of them, or certainly above them.

The dialogue between two Christian confessions, or two so-called monotheistic religions, could offer instances of eclectic encounters by refining the conception of Christ in the former case and of God in the latter, which in both examples are recognized to be undisputed touchstones or criteria for the validity of the enterprise of finding a more

encompassing view than that of the two systems in question. In a word, eclecticism is a fundamentally academic attitude.

2. *Syncretism*, on the other hand, could be reserved for an a posteriori approach reflecting upon a given situation and the effort to articulate the actual interactions and effected changes, with the recognition that the formulation of the facts belongs to the facts themselves so that they only became actual facts when properly formulated and discovered as such.

The message of the Buddha, for instance, did not contain any cultic injunctions. The Buddhist rituals today are the fruit of a syncretistic combination with the existing cults of the countries where Buddhism spread—or rather where Buddhists went and settled down—by conversion or immigration. Christian festivals, for that matter, are also the fruit of a syncretistic encounter between the Judaic cultural pattern and the celebrations of the peoples among whom Christianity spread.

Further, we may add, from a phenomenological viewpoint, that the criterion for a valid syncretistic synthesis is that the vantage point should not be totally foreign or unacceptable to the two related systems, although certainly external or challenging to them.

The influence of the Roman or Stoic, more pragmatic, viewpoint in the Hellenistic religions of Greco-Roman history could offer instances of syncretistic encounters by adopting different gods as expressions of one and the same godhead and integrating different cults under one and the same concern. The mutual interaction took place, and the conviction of the mutual equivalences came about, not as a fruit of preconceived possible resemblances or homologies, but as a fruit of an unavoidable historical situation. In a word, syncretism is a fundamentally factual, often practical attitude.

The Semantic Difference

Eclecticism has a predominantly essentialistic flavor. The eclectic system is created, brought about, as a result of an intellectual effort. It is a critical attitude that evaluates, checks, and criticizes by virtue of an allegedly superior instance, which makes possible a better, more comprehensive, and truer synthesis always, of course, in the eyes of its partisans.

Syncretism has a predominantly existentialistic flavor. The syncretistic system comes into being and is brought about as a result of factual interactions of forces, so much so that orthodoxy has to stand constant vigil against the possible threat of such syncretistic influences, which would destroy the self-identity of either system always, of course, in the eyes of its impugnors.

It is a natural attitude that happens, comes into being, and influences cultures and religions by virtue of a natural human interaction on the plane of life and history—for good or for bad, obviously, according to different evaluations.

The Criterion of Growth

The Ambivalence of the Words

This proposal for the use of the two terms does not evaluate them. There can be a justified and positive eclecticism as well as unwarranted one. When the vantage point is seen as a real, truly transcendent, and superior viewpoint that integrates or perfects the two less evolved systems, the eclectic vision can be said to represent a new and positive step toward a more satisfying worldview. There can also be a regressive eclecticism, which is brought about by chopping off idiosyncrasies and concrete values, reaching a certain consensus or eliminating every discrepancy and reducing the field of human experience to commonplaces.

Similarly, syncretism can be positive when the product of the syncretistic encounter is viable and does justice to the new situation. It would be negative if it were to produce a dilution of concreteness at the price of universality, which then would be shallow and artificial.

The main trend of this contribution, however, is to show that the two concepts could be evaluated over against the larger category of *growth*. Syncretism and eclecticism are ambivalent and each of them alone may not be sufficient to understand and evaluate the process by which cultures and religions have mixed, changed, and come into being, nor the actual situation of our time. We have become too conscious of the problem in order to be satisfied with the processes meant by the two words under study. We know too well that a neutral, and as it were totally presupposition-less and unbiased, vantage point does not exist. We know also that a spontaneous and natural mixing of cultures and religions without the interference of experts of all types belongs by and large to the past, in spite of the few exceptions that would only confirm the norm. Experts, intellectuals, and academics intervene generally, when the historical situation calls for their intervention—and not vice versa—though once the process is started they can also create history and modify existing conditions. Also here there is a symbiosis between the prophet and the priest, the *ksatriya* and the Brahmin. . . .

The Category of Growth

The category of *growth* may help us to understand what actually happens in the encounter of religions and cultures in order to evaluate the place and role of eclecticism and syncretism according to one single criterion.

Growth would then be the word encompassing what the two ancient concepts were trying to convey in a more static way. Growth is neither immobility nor merely change; it is neither exclusive disruption nor sheer continuity. In growth there is an element of rupture as well as another of continuation. The grown-up person is and is not the teenager or child he or she was. Growth implies assimilation of elements outside by virtue of a force inside. Growth is not juxtaposition, and growth cannot be manipulated either. It grows out of the internal forces, which allow only to be directed but not impelled from the outside. It is the result of a metabolism that makes impossible at the same time any separation of the constituent elements. Growth is only possible by assimilation, and the outcome does not allow the separation of the originating parts of the living organism without killing it.

Growth is endogenous. It comes from within and has an internal pattern, only disclosed in the growing process itself. But growth requires also an exogenous element, namely the external materials, the food to be assimilated. Further, there is, in any healthy growth, a positive and a negative metabolism, and both are necessary. One grows by assimilating external elements, but also by eliminating the results of the assimilative process itself. One has to reject used or consumed materials, and this, which is naturally done by the healthy organism, is one of the most difficult and often painful processes in the field of cultural and religious growth, namely the rejection of used or consumed elements, which all too often tend to become parasites of the living organism itself. One can stifle growth not only by preventing assimilation of new elements but also by obstructing the discharge of obsolete ingredients.

Furthermore, growth is a holistic phenomenon; it has the paradigm of a Gestalt. We may know the elements needed for the growing process, but growth cannot be reduced to the increase of elementary particles forming independent configurations; this alone would produce a mere increase by juxtaposition (another great danger in sociological growth) and either lead to a split and dissolution or eventually become a cancer if the elements have somehow succeeded in being uncritically accepted. Healthy growth requires a principle of

growth, a pattern, a final cause, a dynamic paradigm working from within. Growth is not sheer increase and multiplication. It requires direction, aim, a goal, it is configured and tends to a limited and well-defined completion. It heads toward a form, a Gestalt, an εἶδος, an articulate and qualitative ontological structure, rather than toward an amorphous, limitless, and quantitative proliferation. It is more circular than linear.

All this applies directly to our problem. Religions grow and transform themselves; they evolve by following healthy or unhealthy laws of growth. Religions do not grow only by homogeneous evolution as if growth were only the explication of something already existing, or mere juxtaposition or appropriation at random. Growth has a proper rhythm. Astronomy, biology, philosophy of history, and other disciplines try to discover the mysterious ways in which the whole universe seems to be growing. No wonder that the theory of a soul of the universe has been one of the invariants of human culture in one form or another. The science of religion is also today primarily concerned with the proper growth of Man.

This growth is what we see today as the challenging and imperative possibility in the world-scene of actual religious encounters. After a period of enthusiasm with, and of passing over to, other forms of religiousness, after certain experiences of "conversion" and of "having found," after pilgrimages to the East by Westerners and also after journeys to the West by Orientals, men begin to come back, often disillusioned but enriched, sometimes still "convinced" but more critical, yet all the more prepared for accepting an emerging symbiosis in the very hearts and minds of the peoples themselves exposed to such cross-cultural influences. The laboratory here is the living human person and ultimately mankind itself, but nobody directs the experiment. It is rather a human experience.

Syncretism, Eclecticism, and Growth

Both eclecticism and syncretism can only work when there is a need that makes the mutual fecundation or the higher synthesis possible. Neither an essentialistic and merely theoretical eclecticism, nor an existentialistic and purely practical syncretism, would at all be possible if, in the two cultural or religious groups concerned here, there were no previous seeds that would make fertilization possible.

Let us adduce two typical and plausible examples from the present-day situation in India and the West.

Regarding the problem of justice, especially of social justice in India, the eclectic attitude would like to find a better worldview that would combine the insights of the Indian tradition with the more practical institutions of the Western worldview.

It would like to convene a conference in order to discover the solutions. The syncretistic attitude would here struggle against the common enemy of social injustice and try to introduce the modern Western idea of justice to the Indian scene in order to fight injustice. It would like to organize almost a crusade in order to eradicate "evil."

Needless to say, in spite of the good intentions of both approaches, they may remain not only practically barren but incur the danger of having a counterproductive effect. Indians, especially Hindūs, will feel threatened if bluntly told they have no sense of justice, but what is more important, they will hardly agree, because the very idea of "social justice" makes sense only within a certain intellectual and sociological framework that may not precisely be that of the Indian situation. Such an approach will trigger an almost opposite reaction in favor of the traditional elements of the classical Indian culture. Something similar could be said regarding the philosophical assumption of the eclectic attitude, namely that there is a neutral ground from which we may be able to combine the best elements of the Hindū and

the best of the Christian, or Western, traditions, disregarding the fact that in order to agree on such an evaluation of what is the "best," both partners have to be situated either in one of the two cultures or in a third one.

It would not be ineffective to follow either of the aforementioned ways, but it would also be one-sided. It is a fact that in these last decades in India, there has been a growing concern for justice, especially for social justice. It would be wrong to say that justice is not an Indian or, more specifically, a Hindū value, for that matter, but it would be equally wrong to affirm that the present situation does not owe anything to the influence of a Christian or Western sensitivity. Modern Hindūs and Muslims are reading now from and into their own tradition, including Scriptures, the positive value of human and social justice, but this would not have been the case, or to be more precise, this has not been the case without the stimulus of the Christian or Western scale of values. But this influence has been possible precisely because the idea of justice is already alive in the Indian traditions and considered a positive value, only perhaps a little dormant, not developed in certain directions, with certain blind spots, and certainly according to the proper and peculiar understanding of the idea itself within that tradition, and so forth. Only through this mutual fecundation will the Indian tradition grow and incorporate in a more effective way its own value of justice, conveniently transformed and evolved. Every human culture represents in a peculiar and certainly limited way the whole possible range of the human experience under concrete given conditions. This fact makes possible the discovery of seminal points at which growth may take place without alienation.

The other example is the common saying that now the West has to learn from the East ways of meditation and inner forms of spirituality. If such a message from the East does not graft into the very archetypes of the Judeo-Christian-Western soul, the results may not only be meager and eventually counterproductive but also they will fail to convey what all those "Oriental" schools of spirituality convey. Only in discovering the very Western roots of such inwardness and the very methods of the Western tradition can the stimulus and the new contributions of the Eastern methods yield their fruits. It would be false to say that the West has no methods of prayer, meditation, and suprarational forms of awareness, but it would be equally inaccurate to deny that such methods by and large have been either cultivated in very selected groups without effects on the majority of the people or have almost atrophied. The stimulus of the East is certainly—and urgently—needed.

What we have in both cases is not a mere revival of an old value, but a new feature of that particular culture or religion that in such a way can be said to be growing.

In these two examples we may see clearly the place and function of eclecticism and of syncretism. Both seem to be necessary, and both may not be sufficient. The eclectic approach has to examine the theoretical issues involved and see whether it can map ways of mutual understanding and cross-fertilization. No one-sided concept may satisfy, and such an approach may discover the limitations and flaws of the Western ideal of social justice, or the boundaries and even perhaps shortcomings of the traditional Indian forms of spirituality and the like.

The syncretistic method will see that the actual interaction takes place, that trade unions be established in India and ashrams in the West; it will take cognizance of the historical situation and the real results. It will not superimpose one pattern on the other, nor prevent an unforeseen and unpredictable development.

But in both cases a critical attitude is needed. It does go not without saying that the results are or have to be always positive. It is here that the concept of growth provides us with a formal criterion. The criterion is only formal indeed, for we may have still different opinions of what is a healthy, welcome, and desirable growth. Some may welcome—as in

times past—a growth in numbers, not in quality and awareness. Others may set no conditions to expansion and change in understanding, and so forth.

One final consideration. Growth is not unlimited or shapeless. The model for growth is not that of a gigantic single organization made of an increasing number of individuals, but rather that living organism in which each person is a center of relationships. These types of relationships are free and conscious, that is, personal. They are neither extrinsic, as of independent factors, nor are they intrinsic either, as of totally dependent members of one same individual body. Personal relationships, or, in other words, free and conscious relations, form the warp and woof of the ultimate pattern of the universe in which each person as a knot in the net of relationships reflects the whole of the net and maintains its taut condition as well.

The model for growth in the field of the religious encounter is neither the individual nor the collective but the person. Religious traditions, like persons, are unique, but they are also *ontonomically* related and mutually inter- and intradependent. The melody is the basis and in a way is already the whole symphony, but the symphony needs the different and even divergent melodies in order to be the perfect accomplishment of the human orchestra.

FROM A PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS TO A RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The religious traditions of Asia, Africa, America . . . are emphasizing, after two millennia of Christianity, the problem of the latter's most radical identity and are asking it to define its true attitude toward these traditions. A real meeting with the Asian East, for example, which has not yet taken place, as it has not with Islam, although it is claimed that it has, presents the following dilemma to a Christian consciousness—dropping its universalist assumption or accepting a mutation that has not yet taken place in its development over the course of time. The postcolonial era that we are experiencing will not truly be understood as long as the nations, meaning human groups (that is why I am not saying the States), will not have attained a real autonomy, not only in the political order, but also in the economic and cultural order. For this autonomy—that I have called "ontonomy"—to be accomplished, acknowledgment of religious pluralism is required. If the West does not attain the religious heart in its meeting with other civilizations, it offers only more or less modulated variations of the same colonialistic theme. Each culture offers a religion its language, but it is religion that gives culture its ultimate content. One does not respect the culture if one does not also take the religion seriously.

The problems between Christianity and Islam, between Christianity and the Far East or Africa, will not be resolved by a third Vatican Council. The ecumenical councils, so far, have only been councils of the Mediterranean *oikumen* and of its colonies; they have been meetings that deal with internal affairs of a culture and of a religion. The challenge that Islam and other religions and cultures present to Christianity requires a second Jerusalem Council, where the fundamental issue to be cleared up will be what it means to be Christian. Does one have to belong culturally to the Western world to understand and to adopt Christianity? Does one have to be spiritually a Semite to be Christian? If Christianity—and Islam in its same universal pretention—do not find an adequate answer to this problem, they will be reduced in this world to being a purely Western sect with traits that are more or less oriental. Either Christianity is ready to undergo a new conversion—that is, a radical transformation—or, to the non-Western world, it will look like a foreign religion and, quite possibly, an anachronism from the past. The change would open our eyes to the distinction between a faith—that Christians would not cease to call Christian—and Christianity as an institution. I am referring here to the distinction between an Incarnation in the flesh—allow me to use this pleonasm—and an Incarnation into history. Can Christianity lose its "ity" and continue to be Christian?

The Asiatic continent, from Asia Minor to Japan—as much as the African content—cannot be reduced to a common denominator. Not only are Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism live religions, but also humanism, animism, and many other religions have their

* First published as "De una pluralidad de religiones a un pluralismo religioso," in VV. AA., *Fe Adelante* (Madrid: Darek-Nyumba, 1988), 39–48.

place. Hence the problem presents itself more from the Christian point of view than from the Asiatic, African, or American one. For these mentalities, one more religion, among those that already exist, does not present too much difficulty. Because, fundamentally, Asia and Africa . . . are not so much a crucible where the most diverse religions melt under the high temperature of a truth that one considers as one, but a mosaic where the most disparate divergences harmonize under the surrounding temperature of a reality that one does not pretend to unify. While, for monotheism, truth is one, since God is its guarantor, reality is multiple, since the creature is not the Creator; for a good portion of Asia, for example, *reality is one*, since it is divine, but *truth is multiple*, since it must be assimilated by humans. The Asiatic paradigm is not monotheistic but Trinitarian, or better, *advaita*, nondualistic. The challenge does not address so much what is purely Christian as monotheism itself.

Once it is accepted, the distinction between Christianity as an organized religion and as sacramental life, the latter being understood as a praxis that finds its central symbol in Christ, one can prognosticate that Christian religion, as one has come to understand it over the last centuries, doesn't seem to have much of a future, unless it joins the technological expansion. But then, its destiny is purely parasitical with regard to technological civilization. Technology that one considers good, neutral, at least, and universal replaces here what formerly were empires, Christianity, and Christian civilization. After the alliance between Rome and Christianity and after Constantine, the Christian majority had no doubt about its religious and cultural superiority, that is, was living within the Christian and Western myth of the linear character of history, believing that Christianity was the crowning of history and hence of reality. However, just as in those days saints and reformers wanted a more spiritual Church less identified with history, today theologians and many other thinkers, from the Asian countries as from the rest of the world, call into question both the cultural monomorphism represented by technocracy, in all domains, and the necessary superiority of the Christian religion. Maybe the good faith of the conquerors (today called experts and technical counselors) and of the missionaries (often called social or development workers) is today more inexcusable than in times past. It is certain that everywhere there is a call for the indigenization of Christianity and a desire for indigenous philosophies, but most of the time one does not move beyond more or less shallow acculturations that, basically, impede a more complete *incarnation* of Christ in Asian and African lands, since one is satisfied with modernized "adaptationisms." Folklore is replacing theology. One invokes goodwill as justification for one's actions, as if hell were not paved with good intentions. The situation is different if one considers Christianity, not in its historico-constitutional characteristic, but in its aspect of mystery, that is, as sacramental. One cannot separate one from the other, but they must be distinguished.

The faith of the Christian is always in need of incarnating in its humanness, of expressing itself in certain beliefs, but until now, it has done so almost exclusively in the beliefs formulated by a specific religious culture, which is precisely that of Europe. . . . What is lacking is more than a translation. An incarnation is needed, not historical, obviously, but "mystical" (and hence as real as the Eucharist in Christ). This is the theological problem between Christianity and the Asian, African, or American countries during the third millennium of the Christian era.

The discussion at the first Council of Jerusalem was the passing from the testament of Moses to something new with the problem of circumcision; that is, one was discussing if Christianity should be a kind of reformed Judaism or if it represented a new leap with horizons that had not yet been delimited until that time. Similarly, the question that Asia, Africa, and America are posing consists in underscoring if Christianity wants to be a monotheistic religion characterized by a relation to Abraham, or if it is disposed to open

up to an unsuspected vocation, with no other confidence than faith in Christ, and with no other guarantee than the promise of the Spirit.

The problems are significant.¹ We can group them in three kinds: philosophical, theological, and sociological.

Philosophical Problems

Greco-Semitic and Asiatic mentalities (one can say as much of African or American mentalities) do not have the same language. The peoples of Asia cannot take the road—that is, the *forma mentis*, the mode of thinking and understanding unique to Western Man—and be at the same time faithful to themselves while conserving their identity. It is not a matter of not wanting to learn new things or to refuse to transform oneself; it is a matter of not renouncing one's own way of being by confusing the unity of mankind with one of its possible specificities. To want to negate the problem is typical of the colonial mentality that believes that what is good for one people is good for the whole world, and that, fundamentally, being is univocal. It may be true that there is a human nature, but its concept is far from universal: this means that this same human nature understands itself in many different ways, and that this differing self-understanding belongs itself to human nature. The fundamental conceptions of more than one Oriental people cannot be in accordance with the implicit presuppositions of the Western world, nor with those of the Bible. To want to make these peoples enter through ways of intelligibility and forms of life that are foreign to them is not only impossible, but it would also represent first-class violence if this were carried out consciously.

In other words, the human "vein" of the "Abrahamic" religio-cultural family, in which Christianity—and Islam itself—is inserted, is not the only ethnic or cultural or religious vein of mankind. To think that the Bible, the Christian dogmas, or even historical facts have universal value implies that one erects a priori one specific culture and religion as an absolute model for all others, without being aware of the politico-cultural and religious conditioning of all human and even divine activity over another people.

Theological Problems

In spite of the praiseworthy efforts and successes achieved, we do not as of yet have an Asiatic, African theology . . . or rather Asiatic or African theologies . . . that would represent an understanding of the mystery of reality, which would not be a mere translation of what other cultures and ways of thinking have elaborated. Each theological concept is valid and intelligible within a specific context. And the context of historical Christianity is quite different from the Asiatic or African context, and so on, which means that the Scriptures and all theological formulations are both intelligible from a particular perspective. What we are saying can be well seen if we refer to the example of Islam, at least within its own majority orthodox interpretation according to its particular vision of the Divine Revelation of the Qur'an taken literally. This leads to considering it as a unique, uncreated, inimitable book, the only one that contains the fullness of the true revelation and that abrogates or surpasses, from this very fact, all scriptural books and all concepts that precede it or that will follow it. Enclosed within its text is the definitive manifestation of God, and there is no longer and there will no longer be another possible form of belief in Him, nor of serving His desires. The fundamental constant of Islamic theologians, according to which there is but one reading of

¹ See the writings of Mohammed Haddad as evidence of the opening of Islam toward other religions.

the unique Qur'an, infallibly carries with it the fundamentalist project of fusion and confusion between religion and state (*din wa dawla*), which also infallibly brings about that by trying to spread the religious message: one must necessarily adopt its sociopolitical vision of life and of the world, on pain of being considered inferior citizens who do not know how to conduct their own selves. The Qur'an, when it is dictated in pure Arabic language, already implies a reasoning in Arabic that is forbidden to one who is not Arab or does not feel he is an Arab. Islam represents a new chosen people who must spread not only its message but also its language and way of being, so that all may have access to its privileged group. One must not forget the revolt—this means that schism born and in fact developed among the Indo-European peoples. In that sense, the Gospel is much more subtle and may be, therefore because of this fact, in much greater danger of falling into a claimed universalism. For it is easier for it to be transmitted to other cultural groups, to be assimilated by other countries, because the teachings that emanate from it do not have a localization that is as intrinsically geographical nor culturally univocal. It must also be said that those who have propagated it have not presented other universal interpretations.

There is not and cannot be a unique universal human perspective. A fundamental lived experience like God, Man, and World, for example, is not experienced the same way. Not only cultural and even theological pluralism imposes itself, but one must also find room for religious pluralism. Elaborating a passing—"pascha"—from a *plurality of religions*, merely tolerated *de facto* to a *religious pluralism*, fully accepted *de iure*, is a theological task of the greatest magnitude, on which the destiny of mankind depends in great part and, consequently, that of Christianity and of Islam in Asia and in the rest of the world. The very word "theology" is problematic and must be studied in its two components of *theos* and *logos*.

We could ask ourselves, "What does remain of Christianity?" "According to the people, who is the Son of Man?" Once I had to preside over a meeting that was bent on studying Peter's response in the context of India. Only one word emerged as invariable and universal, since both "Christ" and "son of the living God" didn't seem to express Christian faith when they were translated in the different Indian languages: there are many "anointed ones," and we are all "children of the living God." The validity of Peter's words consists in what he *confessed* and said "You" to the one whom he had in front of the eyes of his faith. There is a reason why Jesus prohibited his disciple from telling anyone whatsoever who he was. Because the important thing is to meet the "you."

Sociological Problems

Christianity—as any religion—has a double option here: either to accept its limitations, its historical horizon, and its Mediterranean heritage without trying to transcend them, or else understand itself as a leaven that ferments the masses. In the first option, Christianity is a religion similar to others and has no right to want to supplant others.

In the second option, Christianity, stripped of its Mediterranean cloak and its doctrines, is able to find its essence: Christ, the divine reality of whom Man becomes aware as Jesus did. He had no intention of founding a church. He simply told the apostles to spread the good tidings: the divinity of the "son of Man" that belongs to every man.

Christianity then acts as a stimulating agent, and sometimes even as a catalyst, within mankind's traditions, so that the latter may realize more fully their respective vocations and better adapt to their respective tasks and not renounce their constant improvement. Salt does not want to convert everything into salt, but only to give a stronger and better taste to each thing. The Christian would keep his Muslim, Hindū, Buddhist (etc.) brother, and equally

accept reciprocal counsel and influence. Numerous are the possible spices of seasoning and dressing of a food.

The religion of Christianity in the first case will continue to be one of the so many religions that exist throughout the world. The Christian who feels that vocation will not cease to be member of the church, but will also constitute part of a sacramental, fundamental community that can be both Muslim, Hindū, Buddhist, secular, Shintoist, or other; he will be a bridge and a mediator between worlds, cultures, and religions.

On the basis of the above considerations an authentic religious meeting would require:

1. A true acceptance, from both sides, of the fact that both their religious books and their theological and philosophico-social concepts are valid and intelligible within a specific context. That it would be absurd to claim, impossibly, that there is only one universal human perspective.

2. That, consequently, we must relativize all our religious and cultural absolutes, thus opening a breach in our idolatrous and colonialist ideals, thus making the true work of building with the "other" possible for us. That relativizing would not lead us—in spite of what is generally believed—to doubt all knowledge, but would remind us that the Mystery is inexhaustible. We could thus, together, take up a radical position against the fanaticism of orthodoxies, with their absolute securities and their exclusive monopoly of truth, always in the heart of their partisans. The relativity of this human position must not be confused with an agnostic relativism. The more I am authentically convinced of what is mine, the better shall I understand the other's conviction. Living faith is beyond all orthodoxy, through circumventing the weight of history and its written cultural memories.

3. Within such an opened-up perspective, one could undertake a reconsideration of our respective religious messages, applying a sapiential methodology, free from previous biases, *open* to assimilation of new and complementary perspectives, and with a decisive *critical attitude* toward conclusions. I have called this "dialogical dialogue"—which is not didactic dialogue.

The meeting between religions must be a road with two-way traffic so that mutual fecundation may take place.

In summary, the Christian seed fell in the world a long time ago. But this seed has often been choked by the Christian institutions themselves, exogenous in origin and character. The Asian Far East, for example, has asked the Christian world: What is it that is *specifically* Christian? If the answer is that of an incarnated Word and in the process of being incarnated, the answers are already there: all human beings who allow themselves to be possessed by the Word are already on the road to the kingdom. If the answer is limited to the order of history and of stock phrases, Christianity in Asia, as in the rest of the world, will have to follow the coming and going of historical events: it will be a cultural movement. The problem consists in what Christianity will become—and, I shall add, in what we believe it is.

ECUMENICAL AND CRITICAL ECUMENISM

Toward an Ecumenical Ecumenism

Any serious theological reflection must confront ecumenical problems. One can no longer practice theology in isolation or merely within one's own group. It is said that ecumenism is going through a crisis and maybe it is no longer a novelty. However it could be that there is a more catholic perspective, that is, a universal one.

The situation in which humanity finds itself at present needs to expand and transform the meaning of the word "ecumenism." Twenty-five years ago, following certain tendencies of Christian ecumenism, I proposed the term "ecumenical ecumenism"; by this I wanted to indicate a genuine and sincere encounter between religions.

Christian ecumenism strives to attain unity among Christians without suffocating their diversity. It does not wish to set up a competition that implies winners and losers. The aim is find a point of agreement while deeply adhering to the principle, both transcendent and immanent, of the various Christian confessions. Recognizing this agreement between transcendence-immanence, it is not that ecumenism demands a uniformity of opinions; rather, it means harmony among awakened hearts.

Ecumenical ecumenism strives to extend this new opening to the whole human family. The objective is a better understanding, a corrective criticism, and hopefully, mutual fecundation among the religious traditions of the world, without watering down their respective inheritance or compromising their possible harmony or the possible irreconcilable differences. The task has only just begun, but already one can see the ripening of certain fruits.

The expression "ecumenical ecumenism" has a double meaning: one is Christian and one ecumenical. Christian ecumenism, if it really wants to be ecumenical, cannot be reduced to the resolution of what we could call the domestic problems of Christians or the healing of old wounds. It should, instead, take the whole world situation seriously into consideration and take on the task of making room for the religions of the world in the Christian economy of salvation, without any a priori subordination of the other religions to the Christian one. This can be accomplished without belittling Christian self-understanding. No authentic understanding excludes another, even if *objectively* contradictory, because Man is not merely an object to be interpreted. Even the position of those Christians who believe in an *Absolutheitsanspruch* of Christianity does not contradict the *fact* that other believers maintain a sort of absolute claim. One cannot believe in the two claims at the same time, but both can believe in their respective convictions without contradicting themselves; otherwise the beliefs would be totally objectifiable perspectives and would have nothing to

* First published as "Vers un ecumenisme ecuménic," *Questions de vida cristiana* no. 140 (Montserrat, 1988): 80-86, and "Ecumenisme crític," *Questions de vida cristiana* no. 144 (Montserrat, 1988): 120-23.

do with the believer. It would no longer be a matter of living beliefs that are far more than mere doctrinal speculations.

This ecumenical attitude has a consequence: to provide a better framework for an adequate perspective even in purely Christian controversies. Catholics and Protestants would discover their different contexts with greater ease; they would understand each other better—for example, when dealing with the nature of the sacraments—if they made the effort also to understand the nature of the Hindū *samskara*, instead of debating only from the standpoint of their respective traditions. This is not a strategic reason; it is fundamentally methodological. The divergences and common perspectives can only be seen when they appear on a wider and common horizon. To understand the problem that we are trying to clarify together here, it is necessary to acknowledge the different starting points. Yet to do this we must place them on a wider background, that is, precisely the one offered by the other religion.

Ecumenical ecumenism is the path through which world religions could enter into a dialogue with many voices. I would call it *dharmā-samanvaya* or harmonization (convergence, meeting) of all the *dharma*s or religions, that is, of all the traditions that deal with the ultimate aspects of Man. I repeat that *samanvaya* does not necessarily mean equality, but it implies the hope that the cacophony we are experiencing at present may be transformed into a future symphony.

Christians should not be afraid to take part in this ecumenical roundtable. They were, after all, the pioneers of modern ecumenism, just as they distinguished themselves for their intolerance and exclusivism. Both these experiences, positive and negative, are a valuable contribution. Ecumenical ecumenism represents a common search for truth with a genuine dialogical attitude (not merely a dialectic one), open not just from one to the other, but also to any other possible dimension of immanence and/or transcendence.

A fundamental premise for ecumenical ecumenism is that no individual or collectivity has a universal conscience. Conscience appears with the discovery of the other: if there is no other, there is no conscience. Whatever else the physical world (science), or the metaphysical realm (religion) is, or other people and their works (humanity) are, the human conscience can only arise when it starts to assimilate these fundamental polarities.

Nevertheless, we have the tendency to build up an ever more uninhabitable and fragmented world around us in combat zones between us and them. The very word *ecumene* should be purified of its ethnocentric connotations.

It appears to me that this exclusivist mentality between the some and others is at the root of the present human malaise. And, obviously, the religions that are concerned with the ultimate problems of human life are particularly responsible for this type of exclusivism that condemns the other. Here we should distinguish between *relativism*, which is agnostic and untenable, and *relativity*, which is realistic and bears in mind that truth itself is relational. On an existential level, the question is how people and populations should relate to others in a constructive way. It is the most urgent human problem of our times and often deliberately ignored. It should not be necessary to evoke the specter of hunger in the world or nuclear arms to make this clear. Obviously it is necessary to be able to count on the strength of all the traditions of humanity to get out of this blind alley. Finally, so that ecumenism can truly be ecumenical, the following points should be borne in mind.

1. Human beings are incomplete, unfinished, and in this sense, infinite. They are on the path to becoming something that they have yet to become. This process is constitutive, and therefore the ideal is not to complete it, but to convert possible dialectical tensions into creative polarities. This is why the ecumenical task is infinite; it will never end, nor should it ever end, because it is a constitutive part of the human pilgrimage. The image of a single

shepherd with a single flock, to use Christian terminology, is eschatological and cannot be applied to history. Humility is an intellectual virtue. The dialectics of the end and the means are not applicable in this case because the end coincides with the means. To understand the other, which is impossible without love, is in no way a means (to convince him, for example), but an end in itself. True ecumenism has a contemplative dimension. This is another reason why genuine ecumenism has neither preconceived ideas nor secret plans. It is not a case of apologetics. The more we are convinced of our opinions, the more we will be overcome by the mystery that surpasses us.

2. Religions expect to be the paths that lead people to their realization, in whatever way one wishes to interpret this realization and the path leading to it: heaven, happiness, justice, liberation, *nirvāṇa*, the kingdom of God, and so forth. A religion is a whole set of precepts and/or doctrines (orthopraxis is certainly as important as orthodoxy) that *one believes* lead to the liberation or the realization of one's being. Each religion is a project of salvation.

3. No religion, ideology, culture, or tradition can reasonably expect to cover the whole field of human experience, including the total manifestation of the sacred. This is why *pluralism*, as opposed to the simple coexistence of a *plurality* of world visions today, becomes a supreme human and religious imperative. Through pluralism the intention of imposing a single perspective or absolutely privileged starting point is impossible. Pluralism does not require a super-ideology or a super-system. It implies an almost mystical trust in the fact that other perspectives are also plausible or, more precisely, a mystical respect for the other that makes one's own religious experience authentic. Evil and error are not excluded, but they are deprived of the thorn of having an absolute nature; they are contextualized.

4. Any human undertaking of this kind, whether we call it religion or ideology, humanism, atheism, or something similar, becomes compromised in this struggle for human fullness, in whatever way one interprets this so very different notion of form, which at times appears to outsiders as being merely animal or inhuman or even superhuman. We can, or rather we should, strive to present our position and defend it. Encounter and dialogue between these forms of life become inevitable. Here we should carefully distinguish between that which is merely dialectical, where there can still be a crypto-missionary wish for power, and that which is true dialogical dialogue, where each participant is open to the possibility of being converted by the other.

5. In the modern world, the secular has become sacred. Mindfulness of ecology and the environment, recently awakened in many ways, together with the religious preoccupation with peace, justice, nourishment, health, and so on bears witness to this transition. Modern Man's painful discovery that he is no longer master of the universe, but rather just a member of a team or a responsible administrator, is a fundamental religious experience. Human religiousness cannot disassociate itself from this earth—the *oikos* of any ecumenism, the habitat of the human family—and all efforts toward salvation now require genuine integration with the entire universe. Geology is also theology, or according to an expression I have used in the past, theophysics is also part of physics. Ecumenical ecumenism does not have a secret address book, nor does it keep the admission of its members secret. Every lifestyle has the right to a place at the ecumenical roundtable.

6. Ecumenical ecumenism also keeps a place open to those attitudes that could be called totalitarian. Their wish to dominate the whole scene does not justify their exclusion. The ecumenical attitude is willing to reexamine, time and again, the rules of encounter, but it cannot accept that anyone imposes these rules. Sometimes it might

occur that dialogue is impossible, but it should never be excluded *a priori*. One might even have to consider the possibility that the totalitarian vision is right, or even that, at a certain point in the dialogue, no agreement can be reached. The representatives of the Christian religion would have to accept the risk of carrying the burden and sharing the experience of a totalitarian attitude, just as the Christian attitude has often been, despite numerous and edifying exceptions. Ecumenism does not rule out the danger that some participants might have a hidden plan. It would be denounced; if discovered it will be brought to light and contested according to the new data. However, there would never be exclusion before communicating about it.

7. In the same way that all previous encounters and struggles have taken place in history, the open ecumenical dialogue I am proposing has no place in the void. The bitter lesson of the Crusades, the holy wars, of colonialism, imperialism, and domination of all types should forestall the practice of using religion or religious language to justify unconfessed or unclear impulses. Naturally, ecumenical dialogue is not exclusively political or economical, but it takes place in a context of relations of political-economic power that the dialogue cannot ignore. Religion is not an independent variable, even if it cannot be simply reduced to other factors. Ecumenism is never completely neutral and must be aware of this intrinsic limit. We are not discussing disincarnate doctrines. We are all situated in time and space and in a world of socio-political-economic factors that condition not only our points of view and expressions but also our relations among each another. We should not ignore these factors by putting them in parentheses, as if they were devoid of importance, but we should be as aware of them as much as possible, with the help of the other, who at times is merciless and even, in our opinion, unjust.

8. Ecumenism is not dissimulated irenics. It does not spare struggle and discord, yet it ensures a platform where dialogue can be established. At times ecumenism should be able to wait, in the hope that when dialogue seems to be impossible it may become plausible in another moment. The history of religious encounters offers many examples. However, it will, for example, prevent us from organizing crusades against atheists or so-called unbelievers. Nevertheless, dialogue does not exclude controversy; encounter does not necessarily mean agreement. Ecumenism does not aim directly at unity, but rather at understanding; it does not dream of uniformity, rather of the greatest possible harmony. The power of evil is not neglected, but rightly, the ways to overcome it are part of the ecumenical effort.

9. No ecumenical dialogue takes place in just one language. To think that human experience can become comprehensible through just one language is the last, even if unconscious, remnant of intellectual imperialism; and to trust the traditions is philosophical naïveté. True ecumenical ecumenism is a two-way circulation. The dialogue must take place in the languages of at least two of the traditions, naturally not merely as a means of communication but, and this is important, insofar as they represent two fundamental human attitudes. Otherwise the dialogue will already have taken place in the mind and the heart of the translator.

This minimum requirement of bilingualism is essential for any ecumenical undertaking. As a rule, we cannot understand if we do not formulate the problem according to our own categories, but then that means that we already see it from the points of reference that are familiar to us. This is valid also for our interlocutor. For example, it is not sufficient to formulate the Hindū doctrine and then find the Christian equivalents; the two parts would not be in agreement. One should also try to translate the Christian doctrines into their Hindū equivalents. In other words, we should not only look for Hindū answers to Christian questions, but also for Christian answers to Hindū questions.

As we have said, it is a dialogue of many voices: not only are all the answers accepted, but all the questions are also respected.

10. Every impulse toward ecumenism can be followed if it recognizes a substratum that is incomprehensible to comprehension. This incomprehensible point, both transcendent and immanent, prevents us from staying locked up in our self-understanding. If we do not reciprocally accept this *mysterium* that goes beyond and also sustains our understanding, then obviously we end up with: if I am right, you are wrong, and we have no superior authority that controls the respective positions. As I have already said, this does not exclude the fanatical and totalitarian interlocutor, while it accepts a minimum ground for communication, even if there is no possible ecumenism with these people. Ecumenism's power is based on its precariousness and its foundation lies in prayer.

To express it simply, ecumenical ecumenism implies the rediscovery of religions' fundamental and enduring task: to contribute to the liberation of Man so that he can attain full humanity.

At this point, perhaps we should listen to the last words of the Buddha—"Work hard to gain your own salvation"—and put them in relation to what he had already said: "Be light for one another."

After twenty centuries of Christian reflection, mainly from the Mediterranean perspective and in a Western cultural (not strictly geographical) context, a new venture emerges from an Indic viewpoint and context. We say *Indic* and not Indian so as to include the entire subcontinent and not to identify ourselves with any nation-state, ideology, or status quo. After two millennia of a Judeo-Christian tradition, could there not be place for an Indic-Christian reflection? This venture would not be possible without the forerunners who, since the very beginning of the Christian tradition, have experienced the mystical core of that tradition and have struggled to live their own Christian identity within parameters not reducible to those of the Abrahamic phylum. Moreover, for decades there have been many publications in this direction, for the need of new theological insights is felt everywhere. We would like to offer a forum for reflection on, discussion about, and systematic approach to the complex issues of a living theology for our times.

At the present moment of history this venture, of course, should not—and actually cannot—bypass the fact that Christianity has been shaped by an accumulated tradition of twenty centuries of Christian history, two more millennia of Jewish tradition, and even beyond.

We do not understand Christic identity in a sectarian way. We know that our roots penetrate deep down into the cosmic *humus*, the human soil. Pope John Paul II put it clearly in his historic visit to the Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986: "The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our religion."¹ We are conscious of the riches and the challenges of history. Yet in the present world situation we can no longer accept the ideology of one single tradition as the universal paradigm of culture. In spite of the neo-colonialistic mentality represented by the technocratic civilization, the peoples of the earth today become more and more conscious of the need to overcome any one single pattern of culture and the necessity of a healthy pluralism if humankind is to survive.

Now, religion is not independent of culture. Religion gives culture its ultimate contents, but culture gives religion its language. In a word, could we not find an *intrinsic* link also between the Christian faith and other religions?

¹ Cf. Information Service no. 60 (Vatican City: Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 1986, I-II), 27.

The Indic situation is in this sense privileged. It benefits by most of the religions of the world. This fact is theologically relevant and challenges the ways in which Christian theology, at least after the sixteenth century, has generally proceeded. The Christic self-understanding and praxis today cannot ignore this fact. South Asia is also privileged to have the three main streams of the Christian tradition: the Protestant, the Catholic, and the Orthodox. We should stress here the latter which in its chaldaic roots stands closer to the Jesus of history than anyone else, and which since apostolic times shares in the destiny of the Indic peoples. We could say, following a Vedic and a biblical metaphor, that this is now our duty to take the initiative to weave a garment of many colors.

It is not enough for the millions of Christians living in Asia, Africa, and Oceania to criticize traditional theology past or present and plead for a more fruitful adaptation to the conditions of those peoples and cultures. The task is much more radical. It has to be a thorough rethinking of the human situation. Ultimately it is not a question of inculturation, but of incarnation.

We are aware of an excruciating dilemma. Either Christianity remains as it is, or it accepts the possibility of a mutation at the threshold of its third millennium, brought about by the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Oceania. In the first case, it may develop its potentialities and may interact with other cultural and religious traditions while conserving its identity by differentiation. In fact, this is what happened, especially since the time of the European expansion four centuries ago. Christianity is then synonymous with its past and, while allowing for a certain growth, remains tied to one particular culture and worldview. It may not be just political Christendom, but it is doctrinal Christianity.

In the second case the new step could be named *Christian-ness*. It does not deny its past but is aware of an incoming new situation. The Christic fact can no longer claim the power to be leaven if it remains identified with one single *idiom* (in the technical sense of the word), with one single cultural world.

There seems to be an emerging consensus that humankind is entering a new era. This fact cannot be irrelevant to Christians. Many of the contemporary Christians feel equally committed to their respective non-Christian traditions as they are to Christianity. They would like to be equally loyal to the traditions of their countrymen and eventually of their ancestors as they are to the Christian heritage. They feel that "inculturation" by borrowing from other religions may be a partial move or a strategic step but ultimately not convincing. Culture is not just the outer garb of religion; it is its body, and one does not borrow an alien body. Adaptation of surrounding features is a well-known sociological phenomenon, but faith is something more than a sociological fact; it belongs to another sphere. We are not the judges of history, nor can we delete the past. Our karma is both Abrahamic and Indic, but it is something new at the same time, which does not need to justify the horrors committed in the sacred names of religion and *dharmā*, among other names.

The Indic Theological Series comes out of an awareness that the deeply human need of the hour is not just one of updating one's religion, reforming some beliefs, and learning from others. All this is imperative, but it may not be sufficient. What the world needs today is a much more radical attitude, in view of the overall human predicament and in the light of one's own faith. We detect at least three specific features of our times: a technocratic civilization spreading throughout the world, a physical-ecological awareness of planetarian existence, and the real possibility and even danger of atomic terricide. The Indic Theological Series would like to contribute to the solution of these overwhelming problems from a specific viewpoint. We feel that this new situation presents a challenge to Christians, especially to all

who are demanding action as much as reflection. We would call this situation the challenge of peace. Peace seems to be the new emerging, unifying myth for the peoples of the earth. Here understood as the synthesis of justice, freedom, and harmony, peace obviously presents the polysemic character of any living myth.

In trying to meet this challenge we are aware of at least the following assumptions:

- The Indic subcontinent is the depository of millennial and variegated cultures that constitute the subsoil of our thinking and primordial attitudes.
- The experience of Christ has been central to our lives, and Christ remains a fundamental symbol.
- The polyvalent Christian tradition and the polysemic traditions of the Indic subcontinent meet in us also with the polymorphic fact that many call "modernity." We are at the crossroads of these three movements and hope to integrate them in our endeavors.

The authors of the series are free to express their views, and we do not claim to speak in the name of any organization. The problems are too fundamental and perhaps too risky to claim authority. The monographs offer lines of research, problems to meditate upon, suggestions to check, ideas to improve, avenues for action. Some may consider that Christendom is over and that Christianity is evolving into "Christianness." Some may consider the Christ-symbol valid outside the Abrahamic religions and the Mediterranean mind, while others may prefer to go more deeply into the mystery of Christ in history so as to offer a contribution to human salvation. Still others may feel the need for mutual fecundation among religions. All of us are keen to offer the fruits of our experiences and reflections for the sake of truth, justice, and peace.

Having stressed individual freedom and responsibility, the Indic Theological Series would like to emphasize equally the ecclesial character of this enterprise, by which we mean "community." However, it means more than just a society of scholars or a group of people of goodwill. It means an actual community of people imbued with the same ideals, although perhaps with different ideas, coming together with concurrent aims, although from different ways, struggling with similar problems, although by different means, and united with the same bond of fellowship and concern. The nucleus of this community is the Indic Theological Association, which sponsors the series, but is in no way reduced to it. The initiative comes from members of the Roman Catholic Church in India striving to widen to nominal Christians.

We claim obedience to the Spirit and fidelity to our convictions. We even believe that a Christic impulse is alive within us, but we do not pretend to be teachers. We offer our reflections for stimulation, perhaps for inspiration, and certainly for correction.

Critical Ecumenism

A quarter of a century has already passed since I introduced the term "ecumenical ecumenism" to indicate a dialogal encounter between religions. This dialogue does not pretend to attain any kind of monolithic unification, but a sort of harmony like that expressed in the Sanskrit phrase *samaya-dharma* (harmony of all spiritualities—or *dharma*) and the classic *sutra*: *tat tu samanvayat* (because of the harmony—of all the revelations). These two phrases suggest a serene interrelation and even a dialogal interpenetration of all paths that people believe shall lead to the fullness or final destiny of our lives. This ecumenical ecumenism helps Christian

ecumenism to better focus on the internal problems of Christianity and to overcome the tendency to misinterpret the object of Christian ecumenism, considered at times as a sort of fusion within a single giant organization. The church is essentially an organism and not necessarily a unified organization, since the quintessence of the *ecclesia* has always been the local church headed (or, rather, inspired) by Christ.

Critical ecumenism outlines another aspect, relatively neglected until now—that of the encounter between religious traditions. It outlines the acceptance and recognition of a necessary criticism that is exterior to a given tradition. It does not exclude a priori the “deformed” vision of those who do not sympathize, nor the “caricature” that those on the inside believe is being created by the others.

Let me explain with some examples. The Protestants are disturbed by what they interpret as Catholic idolatry. The Catholics criticize Protestant rationalism. Each party claims that these are only caricatures. There are certain Christian practices and concepts that appear absurd and often ridiculous from a Hindūistic point of view. Christians, on the other hand, may think it wrong to interpret Christ as an *avatara* (descent or manifestation of the divine). The Hindū, in turn, may think that Christians simply claim Christ to be only *avatar*, a kind of *purnavatara* or *mahavatara* (a complete or major incarnation). Such an exclusive attitude and such a sentiment of Christian superiority may be offensive to Hindūs. On the other hand, Christians will wonder at the indifference of Hindūs toward their neighbors and will not be convinced by the Hindū reply based on the theory of cosmic *karma*, *maya*, or *karuna*; by a vision, that is, that considers universal solidarity and the transient character of this world; and by the vision of an order that is both just and compassionate.

Christians will be repelled by the lack of sensitivity that justifies not fighting for social justice. The Buddhist will regard the *jihad* as a cruel and unjust “holy war,” unacceptable to any moral conscience, and on the contrary, the Muslim shall consider Buddhist atheism as an intolerable aberration. All these are undoubtedly caricatures, and yet become notions that are both popular and sociologically real.

Most thinkers, within the different religions, certainly strive to invalidate these “attacks” and are developing apologetics that are increasingly sophisticated. Catholics defend their cult of Mary and the saints, upholding it as veneration and not adoration (*doulla* and not *latría*); Protestants deny being mere rationalists; Christians refine their Christologies; Hindūs reinterpret their sense of service; Muslims think in new terms their obligation to wage war against evil; and Buddhists find words for their perception of the mystery of transcendence. There is a direct influence and a mutual fecundation between religious doctrines. All the same, the general attitude is to defend one’s own followers, although integrating a practice of self-criticism, accepting responsibility for the abuses.

Yet there is one more step we must take: *critical ecumenism*. We must be willing to listen to the criticism of others. We must not merely consider such criticism as a misunderstanding, because the others do not see our corrections as we do, but also as something that concerns our own limitations. Every tradition must recognize that it possesses an imperfect, though intentionally complete, vision of reality. Here what I call the *pars pro toto* effect applies. We claim to see everything, because we are not satisfied with partial visions, but we only see the *totum in parte* and *per partem*.

Critical ecumenism does not despise criticism as a mere inaccurate interpretation. It may certainly be true that from the inside things appear different. There is no doubt, however, that it is important for the believer that his own tradition is understood with intelligence. Some interpretations may be equivocal; the virgin birth, for example, is not a

mere gynecological fact. In any case, the vision from without in its unsympathetic caricature given by "unbelievers" is also part of reality.

Much can be said even in defense of the Christian Crusades or the Hindū caste system, but the opinions of the Muslims or the visions of the outcast are also part of the same reality that transcends internal criticism, from within the respective traditions.

This is, in fact, precisely the point I wanted to make.

Critical ecumenism is an important way of correcting the errors and flaws in the respective traditions, and it is also a good way of gaining awareness of the limitations inherent to all religions, doctrines, and ultimately, to the human being.

Critical ecumenism demands magnanimity, serenity, and humility, and implies even a certain awareness of the ineffable character of reality. The unsympathetic judgment of a stranger can be exaggerated and may even seem unjust if considered from the inside. Nevertheless, it is precisely through this vision that we may have a more complete view. We must be grateful for these criticisms.

Not only does critical ecumenism provide an explanation of the misunderstandings and improved apologetics, it is an indispensable means for self-correction, for a constant conversion and the transformation of one's own tradition. We need others to correct us; we must be grateful even to the painful caricature. Let us learn to overcome the hubris of self-sufficiency and start discovering the contingent character of every tradition that opens the door to a healthy pluralism. We need others in order to become aware of the beam in our own eye.

Critical ecumenism frees us from solidification, from self-sufficiency, and from narcissistic attitudes of superiority. It is healthy and right to feel that our own children, friends, and clan are the most lovable and beautiful people in the world. It is equally healthy to be proud of our own religious community, church, and so on. But this feeling implies a personal and integral relation that cannot be formulated in an affirmative and objective manner. We do not exchange parents, spouses, or children. Personal religiousness belongs to this order, yet this should not hold us back from acknowledging the limited and imperfect contingent value of our systems of belief.

It is not simply a question of intellectual attitude. It also concerns the heart, love for our enemies, inasmuch as they are enemies, to put it in Christian terminology. The intellect cannot accept what it thinks is an error, but the heart can embrace those it considers in the wrong.

Critical ecumenism does not act under the dichotomy of theory and practice. It finds no satisfaction in the dualism of fighting the "heretic" and "loving" the sinner. It brings us to realize that the battle takes place within as much as without and that truth can be found both in us and in those who are against us. It is a spiritual discipline that constantly urges us to learn, to grow and mature in a liberating detachment. A dirty pond does not represent an obstacle to the pure lotus flower.

Critical ecumenism has another function. It keeps us from looking always to the past and contenting ourselves with going back to the sources, however important they may be. In the present situation we cannot say we are satisfied even with the best of past traditions. Today no religion can claim to have the monopoly over the truth or exclusive rights to solving the human condition. Not only do we need one another, but we also need to fulfill what these same traditions urge us to do, that is, to transmit (*tradere*) the lessons of the past to the world so that new intuitions may be born and to turn a new practice into reality. The Spirit constantly renews everything in a new form.

The commandment to "transmit" to new generations requires the transformation and growth of ancient wisdom. This is not an automatic process of repeating past formulations.

It is a creative act that consists in igniting the ancient flame in new torches, making barrels for the new wine without losing the subtlety of its ancient flavor. We cannot be content with the answers of the past. We are in need of a constant conversion, of a radical *metanoia*.

Critical ecumenism contributes to this. The goal is not unity but harmony of a symphonic cosmos, in which every being plays a unique note that also resounds within the unity. The musical metaphor is intentional. "When the music changes, even the fundamental laws of nature change," says Plato, and music—Chuang Tsu said—allows Man to recover his own primordial attitude.

SECTION II
INTERCULTURALITY



THREE IMPORTANT INTERCULTURAL INTERPELLATIONS

To talk, imagining we are external to time and space, is basically absurd and alienating because, in reality, we do not live in *a* time or *a* space but we are time and space—and not just “occupiers” of an abstract and “cosmological” space and time that are not ours. It is true that we have become emancipated from Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, and their faithful reformers. What I want to say with this is that everything we say is *intrinsically* in relation to space and time. An atemporal truth is simply an abstraction that maybe belongs to an ideal platonic world. Real truth is always incarnate.

It is because I take scientific cosmology very seriously that I would venture to say that we are not only living in an epoch of changes but also in a change of epoch: an epoch that must be shaped by mutual intercultural fecundation if we want to avoid another genocide—not only cultural but also a human genocide.

There are many perspectives from which to focus on the human condition. One is the perspective of that which in French is called the “politique à la petite semine.” Let us consider politics, but also other things that arouse our excitement, like, for example, our football team. Pascal would define it as “divertissement.” It is an important perspective because the universal is reflected in the concrete. However we run the risk of extrapolating, seeing as the universal is not only reflected in the concrete but it also refracts on the details—and distorts our vision when we have not overcome cultural egocentricity. We should not confuse the concrete (that which has grown together with the whole) with the details (the part detached from the whole).

The second perspective is the geological one, including that of a certain anthropology that speaks of hundreds and thousands of years—obviously in the belief that time has a quantifiable size besides being homogeneous. Chronology and, ultimately, the anthropologies underlying this perspective are another corollary of monoculturality. I emphasize the fact that cultures are not folklore; sometimes we choose to believe they are because it makes it easier to be tolerant.

A third perspective, which is that of interculturality, is the historical perspective. Man is not exclusively, and not even essentially, a historical being; however, history is part of his nature. I will also speak of “Roman genius,” but maybe we could better understand it by studying the Carthaginians and by comprehending “*delenda est Cartago*,” which united the Romans—just to give a distant example without talking about the “Crusades” against the

* First appeared as “Tres grandes interpretaciones de la interculturalidad,” in *Interculturality, Gender, and Education*, ed. Raul Fornet Betancourt (Frankfurt am Main and London: Iko, 2004), 27–44. Inaugural talk by the author held at a Congress of Intercultural Philosophy at the Olavide Cultural Center in Carmona in 2004.

"infidels," who today are called "terrorists." It is not possible to understand cultures without historical awareness and without being mindful of the multiple historical stratifications that have accumulated over the centuries. Without the Crusades one cannot understand the anti-Christian sentiment and resentment in what we call the Middle East, nor can one understand the anti-American feeling of a wide strata of the population without being familiar with the history of the last half century. Without knowing the history of the Church of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one cannot understand European laicity. And so on.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves what the historical experience of the last six thousand years (before it was prehistory) has been. To sum up in a simpler way: up to now we have lived through a *culture of war* in which the knight was the nobleman and the emperor was the divine manifestation, in which life has been considered to be a struggle. We have reached the extremes of the "Knights of Christ" and the "imperative of competitiveness," thus passing from the "glorious" battles of conquest to defending the morality of preventative wars. The famous "law of *karma*," often interpreted as fatalism, is based on the historical-cosmological concatenation of all beings.

Although contrasting positions to a warring and combative mentality have always existed, the voices today, despite the strategic attempt to silence them, are beginning to make themselves heard everywhere. The passage—*Pesach*, I would say Easter—from a culture of war to a culture of peace, as I have been repeating for decades, is turning into the intercultural need of our epoch—to avoid the expression of cultural "imperative," which recalls bad Kantian habits and has a warring resonance. However, *metanoia*, or I could say change, is not easy. This is where the importance and urgency of interculturality shows itself because change does not only need "information" but also transformation. It can be achieved neither through violence nor through the "victory" (war again) of one culture over another. Instead what is needed is the "conversion," which I have already mentioned, which requires a change of mind-set as well as of the heart—*hieros gamos* (the sacred union) between knowledge and love. I return to this point later.

During the previous congress in Bangalore we spoke of the "dialogue of ideas" and the efficacy of the latter and of education. I would like to give just one example about the importance of ideas, which, even with the confusion we are suffering from, are important historical factors. An unbroken line links the preoccupation of the father of modern philosophy, René Descartes, with the modern-day obsession for safety, as can be seen observing front-door keys, safe-deposit boxes, and the wars waged to assure tranquility by trying to gain dominion over the seas, the sky, the mines, and oil wells. Descartes, obsessed with the "*recherche de la vérité*" and scandalized by the incompatibility of opinions among the Dominicans who claimed one thing, and Jesuits who defended another, decided only to trust what his reason dictated. This was not an easy decision for Descartes, who was a believer. As I said, he was scandalized by the divergences between theologians, among those who, as he wrote in his *Discours de la Méthode*, relied on "some extraordinary assistance from the heavens" but nevertheless contradicted themselves. The origins of rationalism can be found in the confusion between *faith*, which is an experience, and *belief*, which is an interpretation. Because he could not trust the "truth of faith" (as beliefs) in which he believed, the only rational way out for Descartes was to put all his trust in reason. The West has tortured itself in its desire to resolve the conflict between reason and faith that other cultures have resolved quite peacefully, because they were not been driven by this dualistic assumption. Another example is the influence of ideas and their concatenation with historical facts. However, this is not my theme here, even if it is one of the major problems of interculturality.

Nowadays we have passed from the *certainly* of René Descartes to the obsession with safety. Examples are superfluous: we have become victims of the pathology of safety. How can we believe in a culture and a civilization that believes that it needs 30 million armed soldiers to defend itself? One culture alone cannot rise out of the quagmire by itself. We need the contribution of the others—and vice versa.

This is one of the most important lessons of interculturality: we should free ourselves from solipsism, both individual and cultural. Interculturality is not a luxury; it is a matter of life or death: of the life or death of humanity. Monoculture is leading us toward disaster with a geometrical progression. We live in a society riddled with cancer. We no longer have homeostasis, the sign of physical and/or social health. We cannot be surprised if cancer attacks the weaker human organisms because they are not able to resist the proliferation of a culture subject to growth—from the arms race to productivity and to financial capital, even if it is defined as GNP (gross national product). There is a correlation between the macrocosm and the microcosm. All our actions have cosmic repercussions, even if the retrieval of this awareness of cosmic correlations, seeing as Man is not simply an individual, is in itself a problem that can only be solved through intercultural fecundation.

A culture is not a "Weltanschauung," a cosmovision, a way of seeing the world: each individual culture *is* a world. It is not a vision of the world or about the world: each culture presents us (it does not just represent) with a world in which we actually live—even if the *Homo sapiens* is able to raise his head over the cosmological parapet, as is well illustrated by lots of beautiful Renaissance paintings. Perhaps a pure reality does exist but we cannot define it as objective, because each object is an object for a subject; however, there is no doubt that each man, and especially each culture, lives in a world of their own. It is a fact that there are many different worlds—different to a conceptual world as a body of reason. We have relativized the ancient cosmologies, except for our own, and if anyone dares to doubt that Andromeda, not the daughter of Cassiopeia, but the galaxy nearest to us, is 2 million light years away from us—that is 20 trillion kilometers—scientists are indignant and they accuse us of being backward. I had this experience at a meeting of very "advanced" intellectual Indians who were very critical of the West but for whom science was untouchable. "Nouveaux riches?" Scientifically speaking it is also a gratuitous extrapolation to accept that astronomical time can be measured with a clock or an electronic device, which leads us to believe that time is a size and, what is more, that it is constant. To experience measured time only through the use of machines is like being trapped in a mathematical cage. Do we believe more in an abstract size than in our human time? Is an hour of joy, an hour of dreams, an hour of pain, or an hour of anguish the same thing? I repeat that interculturality is not a subject of little significance. It is the only means that permits us to be aware of the *relativity* of all our opinions without falling into *relativism*; only through interculturality can we realize that we are not the only ones who think about reality.

Each culture is a world unto itself, and the categories of the one cannot be applied to the other. The present crisis is also a crisis of cosmologies. Cultures have their own language (or sub-language), and each language reveals the world in which we live. I use the word "language" instead of simply means of communication, as a symbol and not just a concept; other beings also have means of communication even if the nominalist culture that dominates our times makes it hard for us to understand the primordially and the dignity of the Word.

I would like to summarize the complex theme of interculturality into three points of negative criticism that I think will help us grasp its importance. Then I finish with a short, and more positive, appendix.

At the first congress the title of my paper was "Philosophy and Culture: A Problematic Relationship." At the second I spoke of "Cultural Imperative." This is the third time that I have the honor, the privilege, and the joy of speaking, and I would like to talk about the *interpellation of interculturality in our times*. Interculturality poses a question to all of us (I prefer this term to challenge), our way of life, our vision of reality, and even how we think.

I will attempt to describe the principles of the dominant culture that also appear to be accepted by many critics of our present culture, evidently without realizing that they are monocultural myths.

- The principle of analytical thought or compartmentalized thought
- The principle of conceptual thought or rational thought
- The principle of written thought or the ontologization of the law

These three principles represent the strength and weakness of Western culture—not forgetting that these principles are also found in other cultures as they are principles of human thinking. If, however, they are the only ones, there is no reason to consider them to be superior to the principles on which human life is based.

Interculturality does not only invite us to intercultural dialogue but also to investigate deeper into the foundations of each of our cultures. Only by getting to the roots can we overcome the danger of eclecticism, seeing as the desired interfecundation is not a superficial imitation of cultural accessories; indeed it is a new birth—as suggested by the metaphor of fecundation. The three principles I comment on are an attempt to get closer to these roots.

Overcoming Analytical Thought

Classification is both a Western mania and characteristic. We are all classified by an *identification* rather than an *identity* card, which is quite different. The modern world is sorted into a network of classifications: an engineer, an Italian citizen, a man, tall, with a certain income, married, with a particular level of "intelligence," and so on. What analytical thought does is to classify, to stick on labels that only serve to identify. And if we do not classify we do not feel secure; it is as if by losing our identification we lose our identity. A "Don Nobody" in Castilian is a nonidentified man because he is not classified and therefore is a poor fellow. As I have tried to explain elsewhere, identification is analytical. It follows on from all the rest through differentiation. I can obviously be identified from the outside, objectively, by transforming myself into an object. "A is A," says this manner of thought, because I cannot identify A with B; it is different from B. In this way I identify A through its difference. Yet identity is intuitive and subjective; it "identifies" of its own accord, it contains its own identity in itself as it is not comparable. A thing *is* because it is identical to itself—even if from the outside I can identify it only by differentiating it from other things. I *am* insofar as I am myself and insofar as I *am not* another. Many African cultures give people a public name and jealously guard the secret of their initiation name, which confers their personal identity. This would also be the meaning of the Christian name given at baptism. The awareness of identity is ineffable. One cannot say it, but yes, one can think it with a thought that is not analytical.

Predominant Western culture has concentrated on classification, organization, and the differentiation of the real. However, reality eludes analytical thought because reality is not the sum of its parts—parts that analytical thought has been able to identify.

Modern science is an ingenious and giant system of classification. Rational thought tolerates neither equivocality nor multiplicity: $2 + 2 = 4$, and I cannot permit that someone says $2 + 2 = 4.5$. Rational thought can tolerate neither ambiguity nor, I would say, life. This is the second interpellation.

Overcoming Conceptual Thought

The word "concept" has had many meanings ever since this Latin word began to be used—which translates *λογος, ουσια, ειδος, ευνοια*, and so on. Here we will use it with its more general meaning: what the mind grasps and can therefore manipulate (dominate better: *be-greifen*) from the German *Begriff* and the Latin *conceptus*.

A concept is a great tool of reason; it is its creature, as its actual name indicates. The concept is conceived by reason after it has been exposed to the plurality of things and tries to understand them. A concept reduces plurality to a unit, and only the unit is intelligible to reason. This is the famous *reductio ad unum*. There are a lot of horses, and I cannot know each one of them individually. Thus I will look for their common characteristics; I will simplify them and will reach a concept of horse by extracting all its particular characteristics, which will allow me to apply the concept to all horses. My conceptual thought will conceive them in this way. Concept has been the principal tool for Western philosophy since it was reduced to an *opus rationis* (a mere continuation of reason). It reaches a point where, often, philosophy appears as a concatenation of concepts that claim objectivity because they are valid for any subject once the premises on which they are based are accepted. In this sense, each concept has its objective intelligibility, an objectivity that reason, as the subject, conceives by itself, projecting the concepts onto awareness and transforming them into *ob-jecta*. The concept of "horseness" from the point of view of reason interprets it as the "specific difference" identified with the essence. However, my horse, the individual horse, possesses not only an intelligible essence but also a real existence. Not *the* horse but *this* horse is what I am interested in for life—not only the concept.

I illustrate here with an episode that took place in Africa. A European lady science teacher was explaining the cycle of malaria, which reaps so many victims on that continent, to some pupils. The teacher noticed that the children were not able to understand. "Do you understand?" she asked, without realizing that the word itself suggested, "We only *understand* if we *stand under* the spelling of the thing to be understood." To understand it is necessary to be "under" and to abandon the concept and be "caught" by the "thing" that we expect to understand. To understand it is necessary to use the heart rather than the mind. In brief, the pupils did not understand the teacher, and the reason for this difficulty became clear when one of the children said, "But you didn't explain to us why my granddad died of malaria. That's what I want to know!" This is the interpellation of other cultures to the eminently scientific, rational, and conceptual culture—without going to the other extreme of irrationality.

There is also a knowledge based on participation and experience, a knowledge that is not just rational living but the total intuition of the person who is *con-vinta* by who knows. To know (*co-naître* in French) is to be reborn together with the known thing—according to an etymology that philosophy is presently disputing.

Whatever the situation, symbolic knowledge is adjacent to conceptual knowledge. Symbolic knowledge is not conceptual knowledge. The concept is objective, objectifiable,

and at best, quantifiable from the moment when a quantity of objects is reduced to units. On the other hand, a symbol is not objectifiable beyond the subject of which the symbol is a symbol. The concept claims to be intelligible to reason and thus has a sort of claim to universality. A symbol is only subjectively objective. For a symbol to be a symbol must be a symbol for me, otherwise it is not a symbol. For a symbol to be a symbol I must participate with all my being in what the symbol symbolizes. A symbol surpasses the great dichotomy caused by the split between metaphysics (the being in itself) and epistemology (being in [my] mind). A symbol is such only when we discover the symbolized in the symbol itself. The concept of song is not the song, nor is it the lyrics. The song is a song only when it is sung; if it is not sung, it is not a song, and if I do not hear it, it is not even a song for me. A song is a song when it is sung and it is listened to and in some way moves me.

The confusion between concept and symbol has been one of the causes of the misunderstanding in intercultural dialogue. The concept is directed at an object; it is its intentionality. A symbol puts us into communication with the symbolized, thanks to a participation that makes us aware of what I have defined as the *symbolic difference* (between the symbol and the symbolized), in which we grasp the *harmony* or *disharmony* between one and the other. Harmony is not conceptually intelligible; it is awareness *sui generis* of a relationship as such and not as an awareness of two objects in relation to each other. It does not mean going to one extreme and then the other (dialectical), but to embrace them together yet without confusing them or seeing one facing the other (A in front of Non-A, which would be dialectics). It means to focus directly on the relational nature so that one reflects back the other, and it can be grasped neither as isolated nor as the same as the other. This vision of harmony (disharmony) is the intuition of *advaita* or nonduality that cannot be conceptualized. This is a fundamental point that is worth insisting on.

It is a different way of thinking and approaching reality. The experience of harmony is primordial and cannot be reduced to a unit or multiplicity. To perceive harmony we do not need a pure unity; mere diversity or rational thought is not enough. It is a different way of approaching reality. Rational thought includes the unit and attempts to reduce the multiplicity to a superior unit through dialectics, going from one extreme to another searching for synthesis. The experience of harmony (or disharmony) is similar to an artistic experience but does not identify with it. Beauty lies not only in the parts but in the harmony of the whole. It suffices to say that it deeply expands and penetrates our field of awareness. At this level interculturality interpellates predominant contemporary culture, which claims rationality. We say "claims" because actually human life, even in the most scientific West, is far from being exclusively rational. The study of other cultures opens other horizons for us.

Intercultural philosophy cannot avoid these questions. All too often with intercultural questions, one tries, more or less consciously, to understand the other culture by reducing it to our ways of understanding because otherwise it escapes us. Yet in this way one does not do justice to what the other culture means. To overcome this stumbling block I have introduced the notion of *homeomorphic equivalent* or third-degree analogy. However, there is more. Between "God" and *brahman*, for example, there is a homeomorphic equivalent because God's function in a monotheist system is equivalent (not the same) as the function of *brahman* in the other system. If, however, one tries to find a homeomorphic equivalent between "God" and *Sūnyatā* (the void), a monotheist would maybe hope to find it by reducing *Sūnyatā* to its parameters of intelligibility: the cohesion of the system, ultimate hypothesis of intelligibility, rational consistency, and so on. For a Buddhist this is not an essential problem. Buddhist thought in this field does not try to find intelligibility, nor is it concerned with it. Instead Buddhist thought seeks harmony among its "metaphysical" concepts of being and the

intuition of emptiness called *Sunyata*. This is not the homeomorphic equivalent of Being or of God; they are in no way similar, but there is a certain harmony between the two intuitions; one could say they fit each other—they complete each other and do not clash. Perhaps one could use the word *sanyoga* in this case: they converge dynamically.

The perception of a homeomorphic equivalent is in some way rational, in that the equivalence presupposes a sort of common denominator that can be grasped by reason. On the other hand, the perception of harmony defies the rules of rationality (but without becoming irrational). Certainly, as some thinkers claim, we are often aware of harmony when we discover an order that reveals a common end, like the harmony between the parts of a living organism, wholly oriented to the protection of health.

We must not confuse this rationalization of harmony with its primary intuition, which does not claim a finalistic order, as, for example, in musical harmony, even if we can discover a certain numerical proportion as in the "music of the spheres" of Protagoras. The perception of harmony can be concurrent with the discovery of an order or of a "sensation" of beauty, but it should not be identified with it. The intuition of harmony discovers that "something" exists between the parts and the whole that allows us to "experience" that they belong to each other, that they are not in conflict, that they match each other even if they are in no way similar or equivalent. These experiences have not been the object of much study because rational culture does not have the parameters to approach them. We have repeatedly said that cultures are not "species" of a "cultural genus," which is how they might be classified by certain ways of thinking.

An important example of another form of thinking is our third comment, always in the light of interculturality.

Overcoming Written Thought

This expression is deliberately provocative. Writing does not think; it is Man who thinks, but by saying "written thought" I mean to say that writing influences Man's thought and he gradually becomes accustomed to only thinking what lends itself to being written, trusting writing as he does his own thought. We know that a certain type of poetry tries to emancipate itself from the written model, but the written model continues to be predominant. The ancient legend tells of how the Egyptian pharaoh Thamus was not convinced by the offer made by the God Thoth (*Teuth*) when he revealed the alphabet (the invention of writing) pleading its advantages, as Plato recounts in his *Phaedrus*. The pharaoh became very sad and did not appreciate the invention. Thamus replied that memory (*μνημη*) would suffer. In other words, men would not investigate their intimate self but would be sustained by external amulets. Furthermore, personal contact would be lost, which means that learning would take place without the living teaching (*διδαχη*) of the master. He also indirectly suggested that Man's thinking would change and would become rectilinear rather than spherical, analytical more than intuitive, and would be aimed at saying one thing after another, thus depriving the Word of its creative power and spontaneity. Writing does not speak, as Socrates commented, and if one goes back to reading it, it repeats the same thing ad nauseam. The whole passage of Plato is a monument to the living word and authentic human coexistence. This leads me to say: a written speech (*gegrammenos logos*) has little value. Until the late Middle Ages the preeminence of rhetoric was maintained, that of which we are innocently making fun of. We should go back and listen to the African cultures and to learning the language of the senses.

It would be unthinkable, besides being counterproductive, to turn the clock of history back, eliminating written culture, but one extreme does not justify the other. To become

emancipated from the written word does not mean that one should suppress it. Today human culture is still prevalently oral, except in scanty minorities.

Moreover, writing cannot disregard literature, or the role of the latter in communication. There is more speaking in this world than writing. I once had the opportunity to defend the dignity of oral cultures, which, due to a frenetic "literacy campaign," were threatened with destruction because of the inferiority complex created by illiteracy. Interculturality makes us aware of the importance of orality alongside written culture. However, the balance is delicate, and our world is in danger of losing it.

This third principle refers to two ideas: the first to the revaluation of the spoken word and the second to the ontologization of the law, which has been transformed into a myth of dominant culture.

It suffices to mention the first idea, seeing as there are many other voices, including my own, demanding respect for the value and the dignity of the spoken word—despite the damage of nominalism to so-called modern culture and without implying a devaluation of the written word.

We will dwell on the second idea, which has been the object of less study and is an obstacle to intercultural understanding. I have defined it as the *ontologization of the law*, characteristic of monotheistic cultures, whether they be "religious" and even those defined as "lay," but nevertheless monotheistic (with a secularized *Theos*). The problem has its origins in the distant past.

Over the past twenty-six centuries the West has been charmed by the allure of the principle of Parmenides. Being is revealed in Thinking, and Thinking reveals the Being—with greater or lesser Hegelian modifications, but basically the "I think" reflects what is—from *who am I* to *what I am*. It is my behavior that must adapt to my ideas. The attraction and power of this vision is obvious. How else can we reach reality if not through thought, since we have discovered that the senses can deceive? How can we transcend the thought that thinks Being, if not with thought itself? The great edifice of modern science is founded on this principle, as is the majority of Western philosophy. Although the true Parmenides wrote poetry in a non-Parmenidian language, the perception of Parmenides has been reduced to Being is Thinking and Thinking is Being. In other writings I have tried to describe the trinomial to be—to speak—to think as a corrective to the Parmenidian binomial of being and thinking. There is a speaking that springs from the depths of being and that is then interpreted by thought—aware that it is preceded by it. "In the beginning there was the word."

Thinking is the same as Being; it reveals it to us. But who can guarantee that this identity discovered by Thinking is not an error of our thinking and could not therefore be equated with Being? Who can guarantee that this professed identity is not a postulate of our very thinking? Descartes realized that clearly when he sustained the existence of a monotheistic God who could not allow reason, with which He himself had endowed us, to deceive us—provided that we respect its principles. The evidence is only evident for our reason. The guarantee that we are looking for is guaranteed by reason itself. This is what I have called the vicious circle of rationalism.

This leads us to another important point. This monotheistic God is the God of Moses. This God speaks, and He does not only tell us who He is, who the Being is, but He reveals to us, impertinent and distracted that we are, that *Being Must-Be*; He is a legislating God. Being is supreme, but the omniscient and monotheistic God not only does not allow authentic Thinking to deceive us but He reveals what *Being Must-Be* beyond reason, but not in antithesis to it. The *Must-Be* is promoted to the rank of *Being*, and all philosophy (and theology) is founded on this revelation—call it the voice of God, of Conscience, or of Reason.

This intuition of Must-Be is what actually *Is* (Being); it was taken up by the Roman genius, followed by Judaizing Christianity (but not by Jesus of Nazareth, who was a lawbreaker), and it elevates legitimacy, that which is according to the law, to the ontological order of Being. Legitimacy is identified with justice, or better, *ius* is converted into a supreme value, which is why we have come to speak of "natural law" and even "divine law." "Illa lex quae summa ratio nominatur" (that law which is called supreme reason), writes Augustine the African, who had already become romanized, in his *De libero arbitrio*. Thus we come to the present. This is what I have called the "ontologization of the law," which is even more radical in so-called lay cultures, as I have already said, because not recognizing a higher authority means that what is declared legitimate cannot be declared unjust. As a matter of fact, the monotheistic God, just because he is transcendent, introduces a hiatus between what *Must-Be* and our interpretation. If we eliminate this God, there is only the legislative power that unequivocally proclaims what Must-Be, promoted to the same rank as *Being*. Therefore civilization means legal order. Legitimacy is equated with ontological order as the *Must-Be* is with the true *Being*. The transgression toward the Must-Be is a transgression toward Being, thus justifying the death penalty and just wars so long as they have been legitimately declared—despite the distinction Aristotle made in his *Rhetorica* between written law (*νομος*) and unwritten law.

In short, the symbiosis between Judaic ingeniousness and Roman genius, together with the particular interpretation of the Father of Western philosophy, has produced a monument of Western culture to which important contributions and additions were made later on, but always, as we have said, to the main edifice. Parmenides provides the basis, Moses the justification, and Rome the application. I repeat that it is interculturality that allows us to make these leaps and that, without neglecting the complexity of culture, permits us to arrive at the foundation. It is an exercise in intercultural philosophy—an exercise that is still in its infancy because disengaging Being from Must-Be is a delicate operation that should not lead to anarchy or unscrupulousness, but makes us mindful of the *radical relativity* to which intercultural philosophy opens us.

One should understand the scandal that this identification between *Being* and *Must-Be* provokes in the non-Abrahamic cultures. They may well ask where personal freedom and the dignity of consciousness are. Where is the joy of knowing that one is not compelled by a Must equal to Being? Have we no choice but to obey? Can we not also be the creators of our lives? I am aware that theology can find convincing answers if the premises of monotheistic culture are accepted, but these premises are not universal.

Because of the monopoly that many institutionalized religions have wanted to exert over the divine mystery, a large part of modernity has chosen to transform God into a superfluous hypothesis, at most reduced to a private individual sphere. If, however, a superior authority is eliminated, the opinion of a majority has greater value than that of a minority. The justification is obviously pragmatic, but pragmatism degenerates under the dominion of the strongest. The most atrocious cruelty has been carried out in the name of freedom; antidemocratic regimes have been imposed in the name of democracy. We have even transformed love into a law. We must obey, otherwise we risk punishment, prison, death, and even hell. The alternative is certainly not to eliminate the law, but other cultures can find no answers at this deep level, that of interculturality. This is the pressing task of intercultural philosophy. We will give one example.

If Being is what *is* and what *is* is identified with what Thinking thinks *is*, it is not only obvious but also necessary to place epistemology at the highest level because only correct knowledge can reveal reality, Being. Well, this Being, discovered by our thinking, is immutable, seeing that our thought cannot accept that logical laws of thought say one thing today and

another tomorrow. Two plus two is four, now and forever. Thus, Being will be immutable. "God" does not change. Must-Be guarantees access to our Thinking of Being. Thus truth will also be immutable, naturally in the equality of the conditions and contexts.

So what can we do with a culture that says that Being is not substance, that it is something completely new, that it has no laws that being itself must submit to? How can we teach interculturality?

Appendix

At this point we can only suggest some ideas.

If cultures are so different and the problems so serious, we cannot turn a deaf ear to the interpellation of interculturality. What could an "education" for interculturality consist of? First of all, not making interculturality into something that has all the answers. The Egyptian king's answer to his God comes to mind here, bearing in mind that it is the respectful answer of a man who dares to answer back to a divinity, thus reinstating the value of immediacy and spontaneity in any kind of human situation. There are no codified, *written* answers. There is nothing but the immediate context and the concrete situation. There are no prefabricated answers. Intercultural philosophy is above all an attitude of openness to cultures different from our own.

Second, rather than "educating" others, we are open to a *dialogical dialogue* in which we educate each other reciprocally. However, we must understand each other. How can I understand another if I can only do so by basing myself on my categories? In more academic terms, human invariants do exist, but cultural universals do not. Everyone eats, works, and rests, but the meaning we attribute to nourishment, work, and rest differs from culture to culture. Perhaps I cannot understand the other, but I can love him and, by loving him, begin to know him by widening my field of awareness. I cannot state, "I understand that I don't understand you," but I can say, "I am aware that I don't understand you," and this awareness is full of love and kindness. We have already spoken of the divorce between knowledge and love. Knowledge without love is calculation; love without knowledge is sentimentality. Indeed, it is not possible to know without loving, nor is it possible to love without knowledge. We are not talking about two faculties but about the human being, who is unique, who loves knowingly and knows lovingly without artificial dichotomies. It is here that the patriarchalism of the dominant culture could learn much from the complementary part. We are not talking about a synthesis between knowledge and love. Before verifying the division one must first go to the root. One cannot educate according to a predefined scheme; that would be instruction. For authentic education to take place, as the word itself suggests, that which lies more or less hidden, or human potential itself, must come to the surface. So here we come to the intercultural interpellation again. That which lies in the innermost depths of every man, his Being, is not something that can be known *a priori*. It cannot be reduced to an abstract idea of "human nature." Each human being is a mystery, and without love this cannot be intuited.

I close by citing an episode that took place in Korea almost a century ago, after the death of the father of a Korean theologian who was my friend. The Protestant community, which had only recently established itself in the country, did its best to console the widow by quoting the Bible and with the same old "Christian" adages. Some old ladies who were friends with the widow also went to offer their comfort. They held her hand and shed compassionate and friendly tears together with her. They did not pronounce a single word of consolation or explanation. When my friend told me about this episode, he could not remember a single word of what the Christians had said; he simply remembered the neighbors' tears.

A dialogue without heart is not a true dialogue. How can I know the other whom I do not know? By loving him.

Interculturality opens us to our problems from the point of view of the other and to the problems of the other commencing from the categories of our culture. However, once we are in *contact* with the other, we begin to love him, which brings us to a second reflection. Interculturality offers various answers besides posing new questions once we begin to see the issue in a different light. This is almost impossible when we only use the mind, because nobody can see differently from how they actually see. It is impossible to transcend one's own point of view if one is moved merely by reason as the only element at our disposal. This is the intrinsic relationship between interculturality and spirituality.

It should be clear that while we have criticized these three principles of dominant monoculture, we have said that it is of categorical importance to overcome and relativize them without suppressing them. We must not forget that the culture that we have defined as dominant is not such because of the bad intentions of its representatives, but because it has demonstrated a dynamism and value that have permitted this domination. Criticism of other cultures could be maybe even more devastating.

These are some of the main intercultural interpellations that urge us to deeply investigate our emotions, our ideas, and our lives.

INTERCULTURAL ANTHROPOPHANY

The Anthropological Paradox

We tend to monopolize the meaning of words. Today, the word "anthropology" usually means "the science of Man," denoting science with its modern meaning and Man as a very particular species of the animal genus. In this way we have an empirical anthropology, another culture, another philosophy, and so on. Yet, if on the one hand, the threshold of a shrunken *logos*, of a *logos* that needs a monopoly over everything that is human is not overcome, and on the other the concept of Man as a species is not overcome, the "science of Man" will have little to tell us.

It would seem that the word with its present meaning dates back to 1501, when the anatomist Leipzig Magnus Hundt began to use it. Up to the late sixteenth century, anthropology was studied as a chapter of metaphysical psychology, which included God, the angels, and the animals. Although the word "anthropology" is a modern one, its content dates back to the dawn of civilization. Man as such is that being who investigates himself. "Factum eram ipse mihi magna quaestio" (I was an enigma for myself), wrote St. Augustine in his self-examination *Confessiones* (IV.4).

The word *anthrôpolegein* had the pejorative meaning of a popular word (Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea* 1125 a 5) or, better, it meant the divine condescendence of speaking a language that was understandable for mere mortals (up to the time of Leibniz). It was only when *logos* was transformed into the Goddess of Reason that the word "anthropology" took on the meaning of the rational study of the human being. It still preserves this meaning today, even for the critics of reason who are not aware that if Man is more than reason, it would seem fairly inappropriate to study what Man is, merely in the light of reason. This is illustrated by the well-known story of the drunk who, having lost his house keys (of knowledge), searches for them under the lamp (of reason) and who, when asked if that was where he had actually lost them replied that it wasn't, but he had no choice but to look where the light was. (Do we only have one lamp?)

In their anxiety to jump on the prestigious bandwagon of modern science, many present-day so-called anthropologists, while claiming to be objective, have transformed themselves into zoologists studying a sort of human zoology. A 1971 encyclopedia still describes anthropology as "the science of Man, that is, the science of the evolution of humanity and of human groups" (Gran Enciclopedia Rialp, vol. II, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid 1971. II:417). This deprives Man of his unique personal value. The dimension of uniqueness, essential for the dignity of each one of us, finds no place in these anthropologies. We are transformed into specimens of the human species, excluding the real Man who cannot fall into the

* First appeared as "Antropofania intercultural. Identidad humana y fin de mileni," *Tbémata*, no. 23 (Sevilla 1999): 19-29.

classifications of these anthropologies, as real and concrete Man is not classified but is the classifier: thus he cannot be part of the classification.

Ti pot'oin o anthros? "What is man?" (Plato, *Alkiabiade* 129c). Socrates already asked this question quite explicitly, directing his attention to his self-knowledge.

Platonic anthropology, which deeply influenced the West far later than the Renaissance, proceeds from the Socratic interpretation of Chilon's famous phrase, later engraved on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi: *gnōthi sautón* (know yourself). This *yourself* is Man. Man is that *autós* that cannot know himself if he does not see himself in the mirror of the other—and, in the end, of God, as Socrates would say while echoing ancient wisdom. I do not want to dwell on making a typology of the many anthropological sciences that go by this name. I merely wish to point out an aporia.

One can create an aporia by saying that anthropology is an impossible science or that it is not a science in the modern sense of the word. Man is a being whose self-knowledge is part of his very nature to the point that what a man thinks of himself is not alien to him and is part of his own definition of man. Well, to know what he is, Man must question himself. However, this *himself* does not cover all the possible objective answers. If the object of anthropology is Man, Man has transformed himself into an object. And Man is not simply or principally an object. He is a subject, but a subject with a fundamental characteristic: his self-understanding is part of his own constitution. The fact that Man knows himself or believes he knows himself is part of what Man *is*: Man is the being who knows himself, who reflects on himself, who questions himself on the meaning of his existence, however inadequate his answers may be. To sum up, Man as a subject cannot be the object of any science that objectifies him.

Man is the knower and not only the known. Thus, we do not have the right to say what Man is if we leave out any knower, if we do not listen, that is, to that last old lady on the last island at the end of time, telling us what she thinks she is. What a person thinks of himself must not necessarily coincide with what others think about themselves. If what Man thinks about himself belongs to this himself, and if this himself is the whole of humanity, it would be an affront to human dignity to consider him as a mere object from a monocultural perspective. Anthropology demands the full participation of human intersubjectivity. Anthropology is constitutionally intersubjective—which does not mean subjectivist. There are also objectifications, always relative, of intersubjectivity, which are what myths are made of.

All this has serious consequences. We will mention but one: anthropology is not possible in the sense of other modern sciences, for which words like "geology," "microbiology," and so on are used.

Without doubt there is a dignified way, and also a more traditional and profound way, of saving the word. Anthropology can mean not only study with the *logos* of the object Man but just as much listening with all of our perceptive ability to human *logos*, that is, what Man says about himself, about his own *logos*. *Anthrôpolegein*, anthropology in the sense of *legein*, would be Man's account of *himself*; it would be what Man says about himself, the word that Man speaks and says and with which he expresses himself when he attempts to say who he is. Thus, anthropology would not be the *logos about* Man but the *logos of* Man. However, this is why one must know how to *listen* to the various voices, the many songs, the different melodies that Man speaks and sings.

This *legein* is important. This knowing how to listen obviously requires sympathy and love and knowledge of what others say about themselves. Without sympathy, one cannot understand; without love, we do not open to the other; without knowledge, we cannot know what others say of themselves—and to know him one must in some way be able to empathize with him. This introduces us to the heart of our theme, because Man interprets, has interpreted, and has understood himself in different ways and according to different human cultures.

Intercultural Anthropophany

These days, "human identity" presents us with an unavoidable *intercultural imperative*. We cannot continue to treat other human cultures as folklore or maybe as if they were simply primitive and "underdeveloped." Man's vision of himself differs according to different cultures. We cannot refer to human beings solely from a single perspective, a single culture, although we then diligently study *the others*. Cultures are not a sort of genus "culture." In general, culture is just a conceptual abstraction. Each culture is similar to a galaxy that creates its own criteria of truth, goodness, and beauty; each culture is a world with its own *autonomy*, which does not mean that we are condemned to cultural solipsism or that we may not criticize other cultures through dialogical dialogue, as I have often stated. Interculturality is neither multiculturalism (which is impossible because the supposed multiculturalism would not be a superior culture, but *another* culture) nor a cultural alignment with cultural monads. Communication is possible among them, be it through symbiosis, osmosis, dialectics, and dialogue in all fields of human activity. What we cannot do is reduce Man to a single model.

The philosophical question is the following: must we forgo knowing what Man is? No, since Man is a talking being, we can learn to listen to him.

The requirements for listening, apart from an existential attitude of sympathy, are knowledge and love, in inseparable union but not in an indistinguishable fusion.

This means we are talking about the art and the science of knowing how to listen, to listen to the other and understand what he says about himself, since every man is a source of knowledge and a *fortiori* of every culture. Thus we must understand not only what we see but also what we hear, what the others say about themselves. This is the origin of the expression *anthropophany*, which is the study of human manifestations of Man on himself and not only our specific convictions regarding human beings. The center of gravity moves from cultural individualism to human community.

Epiphanic Phenomenology

Anthropophany is the effort to understand the manifestation of what Man says about himself. I have said "understand," but maybe I would have preferred to say "describe intelligibly." One of the most vital branches of philosophy is phenomenology, which attempts to describe what appears, *to phainómenon*.

A cryptic phrase of St. Augustine's, which precedes the confession of being just a man, will help me introduce what I have permitted myself to define with the unprecedented expression of *epiphanic phenomenology*. "Interrogatio mea intentio mea et responsio eorum species eorum" (*Confessions* X.6.9). My question is my gaze, my intentionality, my contemplation (as translated by some); their answer (of the creatures) is their manifestation, their appearance, their beauty (as translated by others).

In classical *noetic* phenomenology (that of Husserl) the *noëma* is what appears to transcendental consciousness purified of all its interpretational adherences. This is valid within a tradition of the essence and of an interpretation of consciousness as rational. That which appears, appears to this consciousness, and within it takes the form of the *noëma*, the concept that can be objectified and universalized. All of us must confess that we "see" what this phenomenology has described plainly and soberly. Nevertheless this is not valid for a religious phenomenology in which the believer claims to see more than what a mere noetic observer sees. Thus it is not sufficient to describe the *noëma* from the point of view of his belief, but if we wish to describe the religious phenomena intelligibly, we must be able to

penetrate the *pisteuma* of what the observer believes he sees. If a noetic observer thinks he is describing something silly when describing the cult of Juno or the belief in Shiva, he gives a good description of what the observer sees but not what the believer believes. He describes the *noëma* but not the *pisteuma*, what he reaches with his *nous* but not with his *pistis*, with reason but not with faith. To be able to adequately describe what the believer believes he sees, one must arrive at the *pisteuma*. Otherwise we describe what we see but not what appears to him. A good phenomenology must abstain from judging the "objective" truth of a phenomenon.

In actual fact what appears to Man is not only what shows itself to his *nous*, unless we were to postulate that the *nous* is the only organ of knowledge, the only eye with which man sees. Interculturality safeguards us from this reductionism.

Epiphanic phenomenology will try to describe Man as he sees, manifests, understands, and describes himself. Thus we establish that Man does not only avail himself of the *episteme* or the *logos*, but he also uses other organs of another level. The Christian scholarly tradition and the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and many other cultures with different images, resort to the three eyes through which Man comes into contact with reality: the eye of the flesh (the senses), the eye of the mind (reason), and the eye of faith (of intuition or pure intellect). Thus, for example, Richard of San Vittore, having been influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite, speaks of three eyes: *carnis, mentis, et fidei* (which work by *experiendo, ratiotinando, et credendo*) (*De Trinitate* I.1). Nicholas of Cusa talks of *sensatio, imaginatio, ratio, et intellectus* (*De coniecturis* II.14). To know what Man is, sensation is not enough. We need imagination and also reason and intuitive intellect. If any of these three eyes is removed, humanity will become cross-eyed if not blind in one eye.

There is no end to the discussion on the part of Indian philosophical systems on the valid means for true knowledge (*pramāna*). There are various ways of attaining this true knowledge. The first, *pramāna*, refers to perception (*pratyakṣa*). Without sensory experience, Man ceases to be a man. He enters a state of ecstasy; he distances himself and loses ground. The second, *pramāna*, as human as the first, is deduction (inference; *anumāna*). In terms of reason it is clear that this follows the other. It is a second way of attaining valid knowledge, of seeing what things are and of understanding what is said to me. The third way is the witnessing word (*śabda*), the reliable word, the word to which we give full agreement and which we believe in because the speaker has authority. We recognize his credentials. The word is word, it is not writing, not a book. It is recognizing that we cannot know everything just through our own efforts. The fourth is comparison (*upamāna*), which we also need so that we can know. That which we suppose or presume (*arthāpatti*) would be the fifth. A sixth, *pramāna*, neglected in other latitudes, is called *anupalabdhī*, that which one knows one does not know, that which opens us to freedom. I will not go further into this *agnosia*, as the Greeks would say, which is related to the *docta ignorantia* of Nicholas of Cusa: even if we are in another field here, as it is not a question of recognizing what we don't know but rather of being aware of our nonexistence (*abhava*), of the void, of nonbeing.

I give these examples to avoid the danger of a reductionist anthropology, thereby contributing to overcoming the false dilemma of rationality/irrationality. Man, to answer the question about his identity, must avail himself of all the means at his disposal to achieve self-knowledge.

Three Anthropological Horizons

Yet there is more. Man's self-knowledge does not end up in nothingness. Man in himself does not exist. Man exists on an earth, under a sky, and together with many other beings

among whom those similar to him have a special place. In other words: the idea that Man has of himself depends on the horizon of intelligibility in which he finds himself. It depends on the myth in which he lives, moves, and thinks. How Man appears to himself, his different *phanies* (manifestations, explanations, visions), will give rise to just as many anthropologies that we prefer to call *anthropophanies* and the different visions a human being can have of himself. This interculturality tries to grasp, as far as possible, how Man sees himself. We, however, only see ourselves in the particular light that makes us visible (*phainomena*).

From this point of view, a threefold horizon or backdrop could emerge where the different human cultures interpret themselves: cosmological, theological, and anthropocentric.

A cosmological horizon. For heuristic reasons we will simply cite three types: Man has seen himself as *something more* among other things, as a *microcosm* and thus of a superior rank in the qualitative order regarding the world, or better, as the result of an *evolution* (away) from other beings, particularly from animals. Here Man also has a superior vision of himself, but this time in the quantitative order—he is more developed, more evolved. These three anthropologies, especially the last one, could be classified as *ascendant*. Man has conquered his place in the cosmos, there where he finds his center of gravity.

A theological horizon. Here there are also three types. In the first, Man is an *image* of God, a more or less distorted or perfect image, and in this case could even see himself as a *mikrotheos*. In the second type, Man sees himself as an *emanation*, that is, of the One, of God, of being. In the third case, Man sees himself as a fallen spirit and also “fallen” in a geographic but not historical way (so to say), seeing as he would be an incarnate spirit and therefore superior to lambs, demons, and Gods (depending on the culture). These anthropologies could be defined as *descendant*. The center of gravity lies in the divinity.

An anthropocentric horizon, which is also threefold. In the first case the essential part of Man is his *corporeality*, his living body (and so this is not indiscriminate materialism), which we get to know better every day through empirical methods. A second perspective would be *historical*: the passage of man on earth in his wanderings leads us to discover what Man is. The sociological method would have priority here. On the same horizon we can also understand Man's study of his *self-understanding*, as a rational being, a *loquens*, *symbolicus*, and *religiosus* animal, and so on. These three types of anthropology could be called *participatory*, as they can only be studied in relation to the wider context of that of which Man is part.

It is superfluous to say that this scheme is not rigidly exclusive. There can be transversal transitions and reciprocal influences.

Rather than go into further detail, we quote some examples that give us an idea of the breadth of opinion that human beings have had of themselves.

Examples

1. We will take a first example from the *Puruṣasūkta*, the great hymn of the Rig veda (X.90.1–16), of which I translate a few verses:

A thousand-headed is the man

...

encompassing the Earth on all sides

...

The Man, indeed, is this All,

what has been and what is to be

...

All beings are a fourth of him,
three-fourths are the immortal in heaven.

2. The second example is from the *Satapatha-brāhmaṇa* (1.7.2.1–6), another sacred book of the Vedic tradition, which says that Man is born with four obligations or debts (*ṛṇa*). To live fully he must free himself, he must liberate himself from these "relegations" (bonds) that make up the "relegation" of every religion. The four obligations or bonds are the following: to the Gods, to the sages, to his parents, and to all men. The first obligation is met with sacrifice, meaning with the Vedic worship that is Man's contribution to the sustenance of the universe. The second obligation is met by reciting and studying the Vedas, that is, by nourishing oneself with the tradition of one's forefathers and assimilating the wisdom of who has gone before. The third obligation is met by imitating one's ancestors. The fourth obligation binds him to the whole of humanity and obliges him to offer hospitality, which means to receive, clothe, and nourish his fellow creatures. As is obvious, we are faced with another anthropology.

3. Our third example can be limited to recalling the belief, common to many traditions and especially cultivated in China, where Man is considered to be a free and responsible intermediary between heaven and earth; without him, neither heaven is complete nor can the earth sustain itself. The "Four Great Powers of the Universe" according to the *Tao-te Ching* (25) are the Tao, the heavens, the earth, and Man (usually represented by the figure of the emperor).

4. In the fourth place we could mention the widespread classical Greek belief in the divinity of Man that, be it still hidden, there potentially, realized, lost, and so on. "I greet you, I who am the immortal God for you and no longer mortal," says Empedocles in a fragment (112.4), which is then used by Plotinus to confirm his idea that Man's self-knowledge makes him discover his true immortal and divine nature (*Enneads* IV.7.10.38), following in the footsteps of Plato (already quoted from *Alkibiades* 132b).

5. Genesis proclaims (1:26–27), "Then God said: Let us make man in our image and likeness," a phrase that was commented on by Judaism and Christianity and then followed by Islam.

6. One could say that Western critical consciousness began with St. Augustine's dramatic question "Questio mihi factus sum" (I ask this question of myself); I have turned myself into a problem, although "mihi" is not "me" and still less the ego. From this derives the fact that Upanishadic anthropology does not ask itself what Man is and still less what a human being is, but rather *ko'ham?* Who am I?

7. We quote a seventh example from the intermediate time between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Nicholas of Cusa, who writes in the chapter *De nomine* of his book *Coniecturis* II.14:

Since the unity of humanity is humanly densified (*contracta*) in the same way it embraces the whole of nature according to this contraction . . . Thus man is God, even if not absolutely since he is man; he is, in a way, a human God. Man is also the World, even if not all things in concrete form (*contracta*) since he is man. He is a microcosm or a human world. The scope of this humanity embraces God and the universe thanks to his human power. Man can be a human God and humanly God; he can be a human angel, a human beast, a human lion, a bear, or any other thing. In the power of humanity all things exist in their way (human). . . . Because humanity is a unity which is humanly concrete (*contracta*) infinity. . . . Thus there is no other end to the creative activity of humanity as it is humanity itself.

8. The anthropology of Pico Della Mirandola uplifts the dignity of Man, as has been widely studied. He describes, by way of a fable, that God had done everything well, but he left Man halfway so that he could finish making himself and by doing so would safeguard humanity and the cosmos. He also added that if Man is a *parvus mundus* (a microcosm), then the world would be a *magnus homo*, a great man: "Nam si homo est parvus mundus, utique mundus est magnus homo" (*Heptaplus*, at the end).

9. We are offered an intermediate anthropological vision by Juan Luis Vives, the converted and then exiled Jew, in a small booklet written in 1518: *Fabula de nomine* (*Opera Omnia* IV.1–8). To understand this and other fables, one must make use of symbolic consciousness, which is not conceptual and is also superior though not antagonistic to it.

Jove gives a sumptuous feast (how could it be otherwise?) in honor of the anniversary of his wife Juno (forever young, according to the etymology, Juno from *iuvenis*). After the banquet, the creator, or better the demiurge, has the great theatre of the world arise with its multitude of creatures that appear on the scene.

Among these he calls up a creature hidden by a mask (*persona*). It is Man. The mask is his body; the person does not allow the Gods to recognize him as the son of Jove. The Gods are literally enthusiastic when they see this creature playing with all the others and doing wonderful things together. But their admiration increases when the man removes his mask and they see his divine and immortal nature and the human "*ingenium*."

The father of the Gods invites the man to sit next to him to continue watching the celebrations; in the meantime Mercury passes the man's stupendous mask around, his human body endowed with a beautiful corporeality that also possesses the privilege of superior thought.

At the end of the celebrations, the man replaces the mask, his person, but by now all know, including him, that, even if hidden he is worthy of the table of the Gods and the eternal jubilation of the divine banquet.

It is Vives who tells us, "The first science of man is that of speech" (*De tradendis disciplinis* III.1 [*Opera Omnia* VI:198]).

I will finish with two contemporary phrases:

10. One is by Zubiri: "Man is not merely a reality that *is*, but a reality that cannot be without claiming to be something which he *is* not yet. Stones do not claim to be anything" (*Espacio. Tempo. Materia* [Madrid: Alianza, 1996], 184).

This claim is what constitutes Man: so I cannot know what Man *is* without knowing his claim. Yet claims are very diverse. I cannot deduce them *a priori*.

11. The other is from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz: "The aim of anthropology is the enlargement of the universe of human discourse" (*The Interpretation of Culture* [New York: Basic Books, 1973], 14).

Final Reflections

These brief brushstrokes will have helped us, I hope, to overcome monoculturalism, which is still so deeply rooted in the West. If there is a discipline ready to overcome it, it is anthropology, because by studying Man it cannot limit itself to the modern West.

I would just like to point out some lessons that could be learned from what has been expounded.

The first would be that we can no longer consider ourselves to be the pinnacle of human evolution, as if the movement of the history of Man had culminated in the species of today. Whatever one thinks of evolutionist theories, they can in no way justify the belief that we

are on the cusp of human development nor that present-day Man is the cream of human evolution. It is much more complex.

The second lesson consists in recognizing the cultural relativity that does not permit the establishment of comparisons or levels with models that consider themselves absolute and above all cultures.

Obviously this relativity should not be confused with any type of relativism, which is self-destructive in its very formulation. No concept of Man can be made absolute, but that does not mean that we cannot defend our opinions.

An important corollary of this cultural relativity is the recognition of pluralism as the most suitable means to approach the human phenomenon. Having frequently spoken and written on this subject, I will not go into it further here.

Another lesson to be gleaned from intercultural anthropology is the following: it opens our eyes to the deficiencies of the respective systems and prepares us for a double criticism, internal and external. By studying the anthropological concepts of other cultures, we can better notice the shortcomings of our own system and thus perfect it.

Yet at the same time it authorizes us to criticize the other systems or visions of the world. As we have said, to know Man thoroughly, we cannot disregard what Man thinks about himself; but we have not stated that *everything* he thinks about himself has the same value. The possibility of hallucinations and delirium does exist. But there is more. I am not only what I think about myself; I am also what others think about me. Man's nature is dialogical. Man is not simply what modern anthropology thinks; he is also what the other anthropologies have written and much more, too. Human life continues.

Man is more than thought and therefore more than this or that person may think about him. He is more than a *res cogitans*. Being is more than Thinking.

Interculturality fosters mutual fecundation between the different human cultures, a fecundation that, as we have already said, demands knowledge and love.

This is the destiny, the challenge, the difficulty, the fecundity, and also the beauty of an intercultural antropophany.

TOWARD A THEORY OF INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS LIBERATION

The problem of the theology of liberation is a particular case of a serious question in the context of the situation in which our world finds itself in this third millennium, because the numerous details prevent a vision of the whole.

It is a matter of liberation from the narrow-minded schemes that the West has got bogged down in called "religion." Religion is a human dimension and not necessarily an organization. Theology itself, despite its name, is not bound to monotheism or to a supreme being. Bearing this in mind, we can understand what follows.

I make three points. According to the *Mahābhārata*, all that is trine is perfect, in other words, complete.

A Liberating Theology Must Begin with Liberation from Theology

A liberating theology must begin with liberation from the greater or smaller threats which for so long have encumbered theology. But what I want to talk about here is the importance of the separation between philosophy and theology, which, with the exception of modern times, has never occurred in any culture, and not even in the field of Christianity.

The liberation of theology implies, in the first place, not only liberation from the tyranny but also from the supremacy of reason, and this causes us to feel both uncertain and insecure. At a time when scientific ideology is dominant, it is hard to free ourselves from the supremacy of reason. True, reason has the power of veto, but it is not the last resort of knowledge or the driving force behind human actions. Human actions are driven by love, hate, or passion, or by ambition, not by reason; if they are driven by reason, our actions are subjugated to a reason that they must follow according to a predetermined scheme that justifies itself by claiming to be rational. In this way, reason becomes enthroned. Liberation from theology must be universal and must include the liberation of the victims. These victims include the hierarchy, the victims of orthodoxy that I call *microdoxies*, the victims of misplaced faithfulness, and the victims of their own conscience, as in the case of the religious authorities who condemned Jesus of Nazareth.

Furthermore, the liberation of theology means liberation from theologians, from the fear of institutions and of making mistakes: Man is not infallible. In the third place, also, liberation means liberation from unequivocal thought and from the fact that it is a one-way

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path. The cultivation of theology demands a two-way direction, or a multiple direction, since the *logoi* of theo-logy are manifold.

So that something can be rational, reason demands the *reductio ad unum*. To reduce Man to a rational animal—thus suppressing the spirit, which is just as important as reason—is to castrate him, to reduce him to an underdeveloped monkey, at best a chimpanzee. The fifth liberation in the theology of liberation consists in liberation from its exclusively Christian image, from being exclusively Abrahamic, exclusively monotheistic.

Many years ago in India, some Christians were arguing with some "very evolved theologians" who refused to accept them because they were not baptized. (In India there are some Christian groups who declare their Christianity although they are not baptized.) I then formulated what I believe is the criteria for being a Christian; one is a Christian when one sincerely declares oneself to be a Christian and is recognized as such by the community. Nothing more. Of course, one could argue about its orthodoxy. A Protestant is a Christian even if Catholics consider him to be a heretic. Christianity is not individual; it is personal. Consequently, if a person makes confession in good Christian faith and there is a community that recognizes him as such, there is absolutely no justification for saying that he is not Christian.

To claim that reason must be deposed from its supremacy does not mean to defend the supremacy of irrationality. This would be the conclusion of dialectical thought, which is only able to think with the principle of noncontradiction; the opposite of reason is nonreason, irrationality. There are, however, other things besides reason. Theology is the knowledge of faith. Loving knowledge exists, a love that sees and a spontaneity that springs from the spirit and not only from reason. The human being is made up of body, soul, and spirit. We will not get very far in defending the dignity of the human being with bipartite anthropology. This is how "just wars" and the death penalty are justified. . . .

Interculturality Is Not Just Changing the Perspective of a Problem

From a rational point of view there can only be discussion if there is a shared point of view. I fear that almost all modern philosophers and theologians suffer from *crypto-Kantianism*. A *thing exists in itself*, truth, God. Then there are different perspectives for approaching it. Thus it is quite easy: one person approaches it in one way, another person in a different way. Then we are all satisfied (happy) because, in the end, we are talking about the same thing. The pluralism of theology is far harder and both more serious and difficult than mere perspectivism. A "thing in itself" (as such) does not exist; an independent reality from my conception of reality does not exist, although reality does not identify with the concept that I have of it (Parmenides). To put it rather drastically: interculturality enjoins us not only and not so much to change our paradigm, but to think without paradigms.

Furthermore I cannot talk about reality if I omit the subject who talks of reality. Otherwise it would be an objectification of reality. This is the great danger for many of those who believe in reason! For reason to express itself, it must objectify what it knows. It needs an epistemology that demands a subject and an object. However, the relationship between Man and reality is very deep. We are at the beginning of the third millennium (speaking at least in chronological Christian terms), and if we are aware of the "signs of the times," I believe that our responsibility consists of more than just making a few adjustments. The evangelical *metanoia* demands much more than just changing our mind-set; it demands that we overcome the mental without becoming victims of any kind of "fideism."

To do so, great courage is necessary; we must risk our lives, our existence, our prestige, and our money, and he who is not willing to live in this profound humanity simply vegetates. Human life consists not only of prolonging physiological existence; it is not only thinking and moving with more or less ease in a world that is already completed. It is an ongoing challenge, creating from nothing (or cocreation to be exact), a constant reawakening, which is only possible when one lets his ego die. This has been said from the Buddha to Christ and many others: it is not a mere change of perspective or paradigm. It is far more radical. This *mystical* vision implies that we need to overcome our rationality while trying to discover the profound dimension of ourselves and the whole of reality with all the strength of our spirit.

Cultures are not folklore, and our receptiveness cannot be limited to finding a nice Sufi who dances, a Christian who believes, another who goes to the temple, or who believes or does not believe, and so on.

Each culture is a galaxy that finds its own forms of thought, its own criteria for truth, and as I say in the third point, does not have an unshakeable principle a priori. The role of intercultural arbitrator has not been assigned to reason by anyone, except by reason itself. So this is how we subordinate interculturality to culture, which tells what a rational being is. I realize that I am oversimplifying, but it is clearer this way. Interculturality is a (dangerous) leap in the dark.

Interculturality Cannot Have a Super-Cultural Arbitrator

Any arbitrator already belongs to a particular culture. In the second century, Juvenal coined this phrase: "Who will keep watch on the guards?" Who will keep watch on the police? Which second ones will control the first ones? Who will keep an eye on the second, the third, and the fourth ones? We have to stop somewhere. The Greeks said, *Anankê sténai*. And if we do not trust this? So we must have trust, and this not just a ready-made phrase.

This is the risk; we must be aware of it and be responsible. When we talk of interculturality, we are talking directly about trust in the other, in the other who does not think like me but is, like me, a human being. There is no arbitrator because the arbitrator cannot be my reason or that of the other. We must *have dialogue*.

Intercultural theology must be *dialogic* (not dialectic); it presupposes this trust in the other based on love that sees, on critical feeling, intuition, trust, and also spontaneous liking. I remember a time when I was five or six years old. In those days my mother received visitors at home once a week, and sometimes, after having politely said good-bye to the visitors when they were leaving, I would say, "What unpleasant people you invited today!" And my mother would simply say, "Do you realize the facial expression you showed them?" It was my expression that made them unpleasant. May it not be the case that fundamentalism is merely a mirror of my convictions?

Interculturality implies that this spontaneity is possible only when the heart is pure. This is why interculturality is more risky, more dangerous, and more creative, because we have nothing to hold on to, no security to bolster ourselves with. Therefore, believing in dogmas is a false theology. No self-respecting theologian would maintain that one must believe in dogmas. Both St. Augustine and St. Thomas say that the act of faith is not concluded in what is said, but in the said thing that is always superior to who says it and the concepts we use.

This is the reason why intercultural theology implies faith in all senses; it implies trust in the other, trust in ourselves, and trust in someone who guides us or can exist. Only if my

heart is unencumbered (that is, pure) will I be unafraid even if I sometimes tremble, but I will not be afraid of risking and maybe, if necessary, of losing my trust.

Interculturality demands this attitude; it seeks for harmony and agreement without reducing everything to a common denominator. We do not need a common denominator that would be boring, formal, and abstract. A common denominator does not exist, but *interfecundation* does—constant interaction and fecundation. It is the metaphor I used before: the space between cultures is empty. We must fill it when we exit ourselves and try to encounter the other. The way to encounter the other is to listen to him, and the way to listen to him without misunderstanding him is to love him, and the way to love him is to be free of my egoistic pride. Everything is united: *pratytyasamutpada*, says Buddhism; *perichorêsis*, says Christianity; *sarvam sarvâtmakam*, echoes Hinduism. . . .

This is why, as the ancients said (St. Basil), if a theologian is not a saint he is not an authentic theologian. To think that to be a theologian is a specialty or a career is to falsify theology. One can be a professor of mathematics, but to be a theologian is the confession of all our being, and this is where, in my opinion, we encounter the risk and the beauty of the theology of liberation. The latter does not wish to preach theological doctrines but to *liberate* us from our fears and also our convictions and open us to the mystery. Cartesian dogma has impregnated modern minds and the policies of the countries of our times. We know all too well that we can never be sure of everything constantly. I do not need these great complications; it is not necessary to spend a lot of money on security. Life is a risk (and therefore beautiful).

For me the symbol of this theology is that of continuous creation and of freedom. The theology of liberation is always *in fieri*. We are making it; it is in the making as it makes itself. We must avoid fossilizing, objectifying, or making the same of criticism already made of past and fossilized dogmas; let us try not to do the same. As soon as it stops liberating us, it stops being a theology of liberation.

Thus, the basis is human experience, what I would call mystery, naturally, which allows us to live our human vocation fully. The theme is this: If we do not live this constant and total fullness, we do not live authentically, which is why we are beginning to say that the only future for theology is the theology of liberation.

RISING SUN AND SETTING SUN

It is more than a century since what we call the "history of religions"* was discovered and has been studied. But only recently have we realized that the "geography of religions" is just as important. East and West are essential geopolitical categories, determined by cultural, historical, and even religious differences: an Indian and a Swedish Catholic (both of them members of a minority) display notable religious differences, as great as those that separate an Indonesian from a Saudi Muslim (both members of a majority). The "geography of religions" cannot be ignored. Differences exist, but simplifications must be avoided: we have to go beyond the cliché according to which the Orient is mystical and the West pragmatic. Logical thought is no more Eastern than Western. There is scholastic philosophy in the East as well as the West; magic and rationalism are found everywhere. But as human beings are intrinsically earthbound beings, even though they are more than "of this world," East and West are categories that are not only geographical and historical but also anthropological. There is an East and a West in each of us. That is why it is possible for us to understand each other.

Although we have known since the Greeks that the earth is round, we carry on talking about East and West as two objective reference points—thus displaying our ethnocentrism. East and West are not simply two geographical, historical, and/or cultural categories: they are, above all, two powerful human metaphors. There is inside each one of us an East, a "place" where the sun rises, and a West, another "place" where it sets—a "place" where ideas and intuitions arise and a "place" where our symbols and concepts reside. But it is undeniable that what we call East seems to hold a particular fascination for the dawn and West for the dusk. Dawn is not yet light (but awaits it) and dusk is still light (but no longer expects it). We need only quote as examples hymns, from the Rig Veda to *Uzas*, to the dawn that opens the way for the Sun's Chariot and the very many examples of Western literature on night, from Homer to Novalis, T. S. Eliot, Leopardi, and many others, without mentioning the Latins (numerous well-known hymns beginning "Nox erat"). In Western philosophy, two forms of knowledge were recognized: *cognitio matutina* (knowledge illuminated by a light that comes from outside) and the *cognitio vespertina* (the vision of things that takes place thanks to the light that emanates from within them). The first calls for illumination, the second reflection. The "knowledge of the morning" requires us to be alert and to open our eyes to what occurs to us; the "knowledge of the evening" requires us to examine and scrutinize the objects we find before us. I do not mean by this that the East exclusively looks to the heavens and the West to the earth. The heavens are round, but it looks like the East has been mainly interested in the kingdom of heaven and the paths of the earth, while people in the West are primarily interested in what appears in front of them; what they can, in one way or another, dominate and make use of. The cross, from the Egyptians onward, has been the symbol of union between the horizontal and the vertical.

* First appeared as "Soleil levant et Soleil couchant," *Diogène*, no. 200 (Paris, 2002): 5–16.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the different "reception" of one of the *logia* pronounced by an inhabitant of the eastern Mediterranean and "received" (interpreted) by the far western exegetes. I refer to the message emphatically repeated by Jesus of Nazareth that the "kingdom of God is to be found in our interiority" (*entos*), which is quite different from exterior ostentation. Yet the West wishes to construct the "kingdom" externally and has launched itself into the conquest of the earthly kingdom and the study of its secrets. The Upanishads state just as emphatically that it is within our heart that the whole world dwells. Everywhere, Oriental writings speak to us of the value of immanence: they tell us that preserving inner peace is more important than everything that causes us to lose it; that the Divinity resides deep within us, and that our truest identity is the interior world—be it called *brahman*, *nirvāṇa*, *Dao*, *kingdom*, or a thousand other ways. The Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, in the third verse, clearly states that "the Kingdom is both within us and without us," echoing St. Peter when he says that the "morning star rises in our hearts."

The tradition of Abraham (with the exception of mysticism, which cannot ignore immanence) is so insistent on transcendence that God is almost synonymous with the Transcendent. The atmosphere changes with the metaphor from the Upanishad of the "city of *brahman*" in our inner selves and the "cave of the heart" in which all reality resides. This difference could be expressed with the words attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila: "Life that comes from above is the true life." She does not say, "that comes from below," despite later speaking of the inner castle; for that matter, castles rise on the crown of hills. We cannot ignore the strength of this metaphor. The predominance of sight, typical of the Greek culture, favors the heavens as the dwelling of the Divine. The predominance of hearing, typical of India, favors the heart as the dwelling place of the Divinity. I am not saying that we should forget what lies below or feel disdain for "secularity" and all the material structures of reality; nor is it a matter of making an apologia for "Oriental inner life." Rhenish mysticism (of inner life) and Christian monasticism (of the desert) allow us to avoid excessive simplifications. We must learn from the "others" without ceasing to be "ourselves." Our era urgently needs a reconciliation and an integration of that which lies above and that which lies below (to quote the *Gospel of Thomas*). The Eastern interpretation of a passage from the Gospels that disconcerts with the harshness with which Jesus responds to the members of his family who were searching for him externally (*exō*) is just as significant.

These brief reflections help us reintroduce the contrast. On the one hand (the Eastern world), the true reality is the interior one; the authentic values are invisible to the intellect, and if not accompanied by the spirit, the true culture (to paraphrase Cicero) is the care of *the soul*. What is valuable is what cannot be seen; hope belongs to the realm of the invisible. On the other hand (the Western), the real is what counts, and what counts is what people value (what they count); what people do not value is useless unless we impose it despotically from above. A hope that is not awaited is not hope. There are two facets of the same reality. Simple objectivity does not exhaust the real, nor does pure objectivity. God is not the absolute Object; creation is also real. *Brahman* is not the absolute Subject; nor is the *tvam* (you) of the *tat-tvam-asi* an illusion. And here we must avoid falling again into both dualist and monist interpretations—as if reality were simply dialectical. Thus, the symbiosis between East and West could be the hope of the world. We must not interpret interiority as a nonexteriority or vice versa. Interiority and exteriority are not contradictory; we could even say that they are conditioned one by the other: without the outside it would be impossible to speak of the inside, and what is internal presupposes what is external. The outside is not an illusion or mere appearance, but nor is the inside a mere subjective consolation for our unsatisfied desires. It should be quite obvious that interiority is not a cultivation of the inner that is more

or less focused selfishly on oneself. It is an interiority that is related to its exteriority: one does not exist without the other. It is an inner state that "reflects" the outer and at the same time conditions it by virtue of a cosmic harmony that is both powerful and fragile. "Only the most complete sincerity (*cheng*) can effect any change whatever," says Chinese wisdom, but in its turn, the outer state, our own and the world's, conditions our inner one. And yet there are differences, particularly of forms of thought. An example will clarify what I mean.

The almost unavoidable question the West, under the influence of technocracy, is asking today is this: Harmony between the inner and the outer (on all levels) is a sublime ideal, but in case of conflict or just divergence, who decides? Who commands? Putting the question in this way means that we have not left dialectic behind, as we shall see. "Virtue is maintaining universal harmony," wrote Zhuang-zi.

This is where the East, seen in its best light, has something to contribute. *Advaita* or a-dualist intuition would be the response; it could be the East's major contribution—though it does not belong exclusively to the East. It belongs to human beings per se. Think for instance of the intuition of the Trinity, which is incompatible with a dialectical approach to reality.

Who commands? In the Trinity no one does. Who decides? With *advaita* (intuition) there is no need to command. Every decision (as the very word indicates) is a breaking away, a cutting off—which in the last resort forces one to opt for a monism or a dualism (however attenuated). A-dualist intuition does not divide the polarity of reality, which is neither one nor dual. A single pole (the one that might command) is not a pole without the other. Knowledge without love does not comprehend this: it has to reduce things to a *unity*—in order to understand it. Love without knowledge does not grasp it either. Love reaches for *union*—without ever attaining it, since in that case the tension that is vital for love would disappear. Only loving knowledge or knowing love—which is what *advaita* is—finds harmony. When the pianist concentrating on his piano listens to the violinist and the violinist concentrating on his instrument listens to the pianist, they do not need a conductor. If we are isolated individuals, the command of the majority may be the least of all evils. But to ensure that the majority does not overwhelm the minority, it has to recognize an unquantifiable something that transcends it—which is neither the unit of the majority nor the duality of the minority: the loving intuition of *advaita* is required. The political consequences are clear. We should not forget that true wisdom is eminently practical. Here is an instance of the urgent need for a symbiosis between East and West.

I have mentioned wisdom. We might ask whether wisdom is more Eastern than Western.

The immediate response seems to say that wisdom is neither Eastern nor Western.

Some Western readers may interpret this to mean that wisdom is universal. The reply shows us a two-sided aspect of human thinking that could act as a starting point for describing East and West. The first aspect relates to the form and the second to the content of thought itself. And here we reach the two foundation stones of the modern West that are not as fundamental in the traditional East—if I may be forgiven the oversimplification.

The first is *dialectical thinking* as the single form of thought. This way of thinking says yes or no; and there is no intermediate term—without going into the problem of the "excluded third." It is postulated that reality must obey the principle of noncontradiction interpreted ontologically. Parmenides is the father of Western philosophy. Starting from this assumption, wisdom can only be universal, given that the concept of wisdom must be ideally univocal or at least analogous—with a (formal) "*primum analogatum*" that unites the different concepts. We ought to know what wisdom is if we want to talk about it, and this definition has to be universal; that is, it must be valid for everything that claims to be "wisdom." The reply will then be clear: those who aspire to wisdom and satisfy this definition will be accepted into

the fraternity. And as we have found instances in both hemispheres, we are forced to admit that, in saying that wisdom is neither Eastern nor Western, we are stating that it is universal.

And indeed a (conceptual) definition of wisdom must be universal. But is (real) wisdom identifiable with a concept?

Here we touch on a crucial point: Western thought is basically conceptual, while Eastern thought instead is symbolic. It is probably with Socrates in the fifth century BC (and I do not say "common era" because it is not "common" for most of the non-Westernized civilizations) that the West discovered the concept as a result of the mental operation known as abstraction. There are many horses and many elephants in the realm of our sense experience. We distinguish the first of these from the second by their shape, their *morphe*, which for Plato is the same as their essence, what was later called "specific difference"—thus confirming the culture of difference as belonging to a being's identity. It is part of the horse's essence that it is not an elephant. The horse's essence is unique, but it exists only in the different examples of horses. Horse does not exist; it is a formal entity common to the various individuals. Horse is an abstraction that allows us to talk about it after extracting (abstracting) from it all the distinctive features. It is the concept of horse that allows us to perform algebraic operations with our intellect. What puzzles us in this case is that, up to a certain point, actual horses obey these laws of abstract thinking—even though the individual actual horse does not know it. With empirical beings, these operations are relatively simple, but things get more complicated when we are dealing with another type of reality, such as good, virtue, and beauty—as Plato's masterly examples demonstrate. Plato's brilliant contribution lies in reversing the terms: ideas of horse, virtue, and justice are real, and things are nothing but participations, instances, or embodiments of those ideas. We approach those ideas via concepts. There is no doubt that the concept has been the central instrument of philosophy in the West to the extent that very often philosophy is presented as a conceptual algebra about the ultimate questions: a succession of concepts. Concepts claim to be objective insofar as, once the premises on which they are based are accepted, they are valid for any issue. In this sense, every concept possesses an objective intelligibility.

On the other hand, without dismissing conceptual knowledge, the East bases itself above all on symbolic recognition. The concept is valid for everyone once the rules of the game have been accepted. Those rules are logic, and it is believed that they are written into our thinking (a priori) or accepted by us pragmatically. But the symbol is only a symbol for those who recognize it as such. The symbol is one insofar as it symbolizes, and it symbolizes to the extent that we discover what is symbolized in the symbol itself—without it referring, as in the case of the Sign, to the Signified as something actual outside the symbol. In our time, the confusion between concept and symbol has been a fatal one.

Let us take an example that involves almost the whole of the last millennium of Christian history. Christian faith, as an act of salvation, implies an attitude of the entire person, though it also has an intellectual formulation. The first formulations were called "the apostles," "symbol," and not a mere conceptual doctrine. Such professions of faith were called *credos*—"giving one's heart," or putting one's heart into what one believes (though Indo-European scholars may disagree). In a word, symbolic knowledge cannot be confused with conceptual knowledge, hence the importance of the metaphor. Faith is expressed in symbols, not concepts. Helping to avoid confusing the Christian faith with a doctrine is perhaps the best contribution the East could make to a certain Christianity—without underestimating the importance and function of doctrines.

Metaphorical thinking is one of the keys to understanding a large part of the East. Metaphorical thought is often less precise but frequently truer; that is, it is closer to reality

than conceptual thought. When someone thinks he has learned a foreign language but does not understand its witticisms, he is still a beginner. A language is not the words but the sense of reality carried by that language. Literal translations may not be wrong, but they are not "translations"; they are merely transpositions. Nonliteral translations render what the translator has understood, often to the embarrassment of those who know the original language in depth. No one is satisfied, and translators feel humiliated despite their laudable work. Each word does not have only one meaning; it has a resonance (the *dhvani* of Sanskrit poetry). Symbolic language cannot be merely objective. A symbol is not a symbol if the subject does not perceive it as such. A song is a song only when it is sung—and is consciously listened to. This means that a word says something only when it is assimilated and someone (positively or negatively) experiences its message. In both the East and the West, traditional texts used to be spoken (or recited) in order to be able to speak to us.

The collateral effects of the loss of symbolic knowledge destabilize "certainty" as an ideal to which modern Western philosophy has accustomed us. The result is threefold.

First, no interpretation is precise, and such an ideal is erroneous. Truth should not be confused with precision, a category that belongs in the realm of science. All interpretations are exegesis, and all translators engage in hermeneutics. Every text is polysemic—apart from texts in formal logic and, by extension, scientific ones. Through dialogue with the text itself we draw (and even drag) the sense from it, even if the author's intention was not exactly that. Consequently the study of languages is not a luxury. And another consequence is that a voice should be raised against the linguistic genocide that occurred in the late, lamented twentieth century, during which more than five thousand living languages were allowed to die.¹

Second, no interpretation, either in the East or in the West, is so objective that it can be formulated in propositions outside their context.

Third, the fact that we cannot state with apodictic certainty what is Eastern and what is Western in a text of wisdom helps us to overcome the near-pathological obsession with certainty (inherited from Descartes) to which modern humans are subject. Is it not true that a large part of present-day society's anxiety and stress has its roots in the desperate search for certainty? And on what is this based? Thus, the dialectical dilemma reappears: either certainty (rationality) or uncertainty (irrationality)—whereas it is precisely wisdom that invites us to experience contingency and overcome the dilemma through the *advaita* intuition of the Trinity.

I also find it important to emphasize the first foundation stone. I have already said that the basis of Western culture is the principle of noncontradiction. It was from the Greeks onward that most of Western culture accepted the principle of Parmenides, despite the resurgence of what I shall call the principle of Heraclitus, which raises its head now and again. If Being and thinking are one and same thing, the laws of thought are also valid for Being. We are reluctant to think that, at the same time and in the same aspect, a thing might be and not be. Each being is in itself and for itself unique, alone. It is destined, "condemned," to be itself and nothing else. No confusion is possible. Each "being" is; this being-ness belongs to it as a property, directly. If we did not accept that, we would block thought. The principle of noncontradiction is not only the principle of thought in general but also the essential structure of the limited and finite being. A "being" has limits because it is finite, and it is finite precisely by virtue of the principle of noncontradiction. If the principle were not valid for some being in particular, it would follow that it would be impossible to state anything

¹ *Diogenes* has devoted two issues to the topic of endangered languages: "Cultural Heritage: Endangered Languages," no. 153 (1991), and "Endangered Languages II: Africa," no. 161 (1993).

precise about it, thus anything definite, anything exact and univocal: it would be impossible to even conceive of this being. However, we would have to exclude the sphere of the infinite.

A large part of the East, on the other hand, has been enthusiastic about the quest for the principle of identity: A is A. But what is this A that is identical to A? Where should we find a predicate that can be completely identified with the subject? Not a single predicate as such, unless maybe the subject through which we can experience the identity is not its own self. But who am I? My body cannot exhaustively define my being, anymore than my spirit or any other predicate can. It is impossible to find a predicate that can be completely identified with me. The I is identical to itself only if it is no longer its finite, limited I but the absolute. It is only in the identification of the *âtman* with the *brahman* that there is perfect identity, but then that *âtman* is no longer me; it is indeed *brahman*. Essence and existence, say the Scholastics, find their identity only in God. True identity excludes the finite world. Then thought is blocked; its sphere is that of the alternative "either-or," while for identity it is "both-and."

If the principle of noncontradiction predominates, then thought has the primary part to play in the discovery of reality as well. And more than that, thought informs us about the different levels of reality. It cannot pass through the gates of the Infinite, but it can go as far as the threshold and, from there, going from the top to the bottom, discover the different degrees of reality. In other words, truth has the primacy here, and that truth will be only one, because it *cannot* be otherwise; that is, it is unthinkable that it should be polyvalent. This is the great scandal of religious and also cultural pluralism—the basis of tolerance and peace. Certainly, truth is not plural, but it is pluralist. But if truth is one for the West, there are nevertheless several degrees of reality precisely because it is *reality* that realizes, which has different effects on my thinking. A certain conception that still prevails in the West might be represented as a pyramid of being, with God (Truth) at its apex. Truth is exclusively one because, in the end, it is the result of the judgment determined by the principle of noncontradiction (since this thought process is essential in order to attain ontological truth). An unthinkable thing does not exist. On the other hand, "beings" are many because each one has its own existence, striking my thought in its own way, and because each one is in that it is not the other.

Furthermore, if it is the principle of identity that predominates, it immediately follows that there cannot be degrees of reality. If there were, there could only be two; in fact, however, they would not know how to be, both of them, because there would no longer be identity between them. Being cannot be but one, because reality is exclusively one. Variety belongs to the realm of thought, and thought is the organ of truth. So there will be several degrees of reality in accordance with the depth of our speculative ability. The perceptible world may be true but not *real*.

Here we touch on the key that allows us to go beyond the misunderstanding between a large part of Eastern, and especially Buddhist, thinking and most of Western, especially Abrahamic, thinking. The latter is a philosophy of Being, the former one of Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), which should not be confused with nihilism. As long as we do not reach this depth (Christianity's kenosis), we will not get beyond this misunderstanding whose consequences are not only philosophical but also political.

But let us leave this methodological problem to one side, even though we needed to mention it in order to tackle the second foundation stone on which modernity rests: the *claim to universality*.

Is wisdom universal? Yes, the West replies, although it agrees there are a variety of interpretations. For instance, think of "global ethics" or "The Declaration of Human Rights." Yes

and no, says the East on the other hand. One of the characteristics of modern culture is its claim to universality. "Truth must be so for everyone"; "the criterion for morality is that it should be universalizable"; "modern science is universal," and other similar phrases are all irrefutable dogma for the Western mind-set, forgetting that such statements result from a monocultural extrapolation from its own categories. It is true that there is in human beings something like an instinct to universalize their convictions, but this is the consequence of analytical thought that is so characteristic of the West. We analyze a particular case; there are more and more examples, and then we generalize—that is, we give this case a universal validity. Analytical thought has no means other than formal extrapolation of the concept ("Man," for example, is a simple abstraction). The universal is obtained by *intrapolation*—as we might say in a play on words—that is, through deepening a particular experience, which means we can come into contact with the whole of reality in the singularity of a concrete experience. The universal is not obtained by generalization or abstraction but through profound experience of the concrete—as the word itself suggests ("concrete" comes from *concretere*, "to grow together"), it is growing along with the "thing" experienced, participating in the very gestation of the thing, which is obtained solely through love, that is to say, if we have gone beyond the subject/object dichotomy.

Let us not depart from our question: wisdom is universal in the profound experience of a concrete wisdom. In it "wisdom" is discovered as, in a beloved being, the whole of humanity is discovered, or in a flower all of beauty, and in beauty all the glory of the Universe—which does not prevent us from being aware also of other facets of reality, including negative ones.

In a word, every wisdom is universal when we experience it in its profound concreteness, and it is particular in its language and interpretation. To use a rather academic jargon, I would say wisdom is universal as a concept but not as a symbol. This explains the much debated question of what has been called "the transcendent unity of religions," that is, whether all religions say the same thing or are truly different. It is clear that religions *do not say* the same thing, and their respective doctrines are different and frequently incompatible. But it is clear as well that those who have experienced reality profoundly in a concrete case—mystics, for instance—do not perceive this incompatibility: they have attained experience of the substance, so to speak, and they discover that under the respective clothing is concealed the very body of reality—which many traditions call the body of God, Christ, Buddha, or the world, although we should not confuse these different metaphors.

This is not the moment to undertake a critique of most of the intuitions of ancient wisdoms; similarly, not everything is negative in modernity or ambivalent in postmodernity. But it is hard to deny that, socially and politically, the world has taken a wrong turn that will lead to a sociopolitical catastrophe unless there is cultural *metanoia*. It may be that wisdom, both Eastern and Western, can help us in this task.

For a long time, the function of genuine wisdom has been to "save" humanity; thus, it appears to be that of salvation—where salvation means plenitude, peace, happiness, self-fulfillment, and other "homeomorphic equivalents." Philosophy, taking for this word its meaning of both "love of wisdom" and "wisdom of love" (interpreted in the objective and subjective sense of the genitive), has a redemptive function; and this function can only be realized insofar as experience of reality has not divided itself off in "praxis" on the one hand and "theory" on the other—from humanity's existential path toward its plenitude. *Human praxis* is not merely action, since humans are intellectual beings; and theory cannot be merely speculation, since humans are corporeal beings. Philosophy is the companion consciousness all the way along that path.

In this profound and traditional sense, wisdom is neither Eastern nor Western—it is human. East and West are polysemic words irreducible to a single concept. Any attempt to reduce wisdom to a unity is condemned to be strictly formal and abstract. Formal “thought” permits only operations of deduction, induction—and perhaps statistics. It has no windows onto reality, as Leibniz would say—or rather the windows have thick panes that magnify and show details that otherwise would not be seen, but also distort reality. Pythagoras’s theorem is deduced from the nature of a right-angled triangle, but an egg is not “deduced” from a hen, and neither is what the emperor Aśoka deduced from the period of his life before his conversion. It is not sufficient to study the biological nature of the “sixth Patriarch” to know everything he did and said and still less to understand him. To extrapolate the laws of logical thinking (with the permission of Parmenides and Hegel) to Being is already to make a logical error—unless one a-critically identifies Thought with Being.

I feel obliged to express these dense ideas if we wish at least to mitigate the chronic misunderstanding between East and West. Some books on philosophy, even recent ones, state that there is no “thought” beyond the Suez Canal. And indeed, even today, most books on philosophy leave out (and here it could be said, “Olympically”) any reference that goes beyond *Magna Graecia*. They probably have a “reason,” if by “thought” they mean the ability to use an instrument (reason) that allows people to predict properties and/or events in order to “control” them better. In other time zones (this side of Suez, too), *thought* means something else.²

Having talked about East and West, I feel it is my duty not only to recall something that has been forgotten but also to “right a wrong” that is far, far more important than the chivalrous echoes of the West’s “Golden Ages.” I am referring to the last millennium’s great black page, Africa³—which refuses to be imprisoned in our East-West parameters. “African Wisdom” is in no way inferior to the other two; it has too long been ignored, not to say reviled and ridiculed, because it did not follow the canons of a narrow academicism. It is not my topic, but I believe I owe it to justice at least to mention it.

² Hence the importance, in my view, of this issue of *Diogenes*, though fortunately it is not alone.

³ *Diogenes* has devoted many articles to Africa and its thought. Among others, see “Afrique: regards croisés, regards pluriels,” no. 184 (1988).

THE OTHER IS PART OF US

One of the greatest temptations of our times is discouragement, which arises from the conviction that there is nothing we can do because we are too small and we cannot shift this huge mass of people—as if quantity were a sign of truth. Once upon a time, twenty-six centuries ago (nothing new under the sun), Confucius was asked, “Things are looking very bad in the Kingdom of the South. What advice would the master give?” The wise man answered, “Give words back their original meaning.” Do not allow words to get lost and then take on those meanings that become stereotypes in common usage, in the fashions and mass media.

This led me to explore the meaning of the word “other,” and as I am a bit scrupulous, I looked it up in at least twenty languages. I was quite surprised to discover that the significance we use today is new, unprecedented, and did not exist in the past. Even in the languages closest to Italian, “alter” or “alius” do not indicate what we call “other”: it means the “altera pars,” mine, the other part of what we are conscious of. In all the languages I know, the *alter* does not mean “the other,” the stranger (from “stranger,” which means strange, strange for us naturally). In a way the other does not exist. And unless we discover that the other is a projection, frequently of our egoism, and we simply treat him like a foreigner, a strange being, an “other” in the modern sense, we will not be able to solve the problem.

By saying that the other is an-other part of me, I do not appeal to the concept that immediately establishes a dichotomy, but to the symbol, which transcends the separation of object-subject and does not permit conceptualization. The other is that hidden, unknown dimension that is part of me and that I, when I think in a certain way, see as external to myself. The other, however—reality—is not made up of parts. When we conceptualize reality, to reach understanding we need to divide it into parts, as Descartes invites us to do in the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*. We are like little girls who want to analyze their dolls and tear them apart to see what parts they are made of. But then the doll cannot be put together again because it is not equal to the sum of the parts. The whole cannot be divided, as it would stop being the whole. We have forgotten that true thinking, as the word itself says, is not analyzing or dividing things to make the parts more or less intelligible. Also, etymologically, to *think* means to weigh up the tendency, that is love, which has a way of finding its place, of not resorting to violence and not causing trouble. Thinking is the opposite of experiencing. Experiencing is to do violence, changing a variable to see how the whole reacts. Thinking is to weigh up a thing in itself, to enjoy it, to understand it, so that it becomes part of me. To know is to be born together with the known thing—despite a certain scientific etymology. Therefore, when in theology one says that the beatific vision is to see God, it means to know God, to be part of God, to be divinized. This conception of the other as a stranger is so deeply rooted in our modern way of life that it is very hard to

* First appeared in *Il problema dell'altro. Dallo scontro al dialogo tra le culture* (Città di Castello: *L'altrapagina*, 2007), 9–26. Lecture given at the conference held in Città di Castello in 2007.

overcome, and also because it represents our myth. The myth of what we believe in without being aware that we believe in it—it is what we observe in others but that we are not aware of having ourselves. When I start speaking, you of course notice that I speak with a particular accent, undoubtedly less elegant than yours, but you have another accent; we all have an accent. We are able to observe the myth of the other but not our own. Basically the other as separate from me does not exist, and unless we discover this, we cannot resolve the problem of the other in the modern sense.

The way in which we have interpreted the phrase that sums up the whole evangelical message, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself," is very significant. With the best intentions we have understood it to mean "love your neighbor as an *other self*," like another fellow who has the same rights and the same values, someone worthy of respect but not like *myself*, as part of me. Yet the Gospels claim, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Unless I open myself letting go of the fear of losing my identification, which is not my identity, I will not realize the evangelical message to love my neighbor as myself.

My identity is indefinable; it is the *autos*, the *idem*, what I really am that cannot be analyzed. We have lost our innocence because of the preponderance of conceptualizing thinking. The path toward my identity is not awareness of my identification. If I identify myself with a thing or another, I lose my humanity. Humanity as a concept is common to all, but humanity is not a concept. It is what unites us beyond the need for analysis. Conceptual thought is useful because it separates; it dissects so as to analyze. I think that the perfect joy of which St. Francis spoke is to retrieve our innocence, which is renewed in every instant, every day. If our heart is pure, we can also be glad of what seems to be unpleasant and painful. Thus defending the other, I also defend the deepest part of myself.

The Other Cracks Our Individuality

Overcoming our egoism and individuality is not easy, but after at least fifty or sixty centuries of human experience, maybe it is time to try a new approach. Perhaps a different personal attitude to reality could be more positive, more efficient, and could save us from this gloomy future, which everybody, both to the left and the right, would like to avoid. Maybe the time has come to take the other more seriously than ourselves. In that case it would not be necessary to struggle against the others, or to defend the other *a priori*, because we are aware that together we are overcoming the greatest human temptation: egotism.

This mind-set of the other as other is so rooted in "our" culture that the language itself testifies to this. The other destroys our individuality. I became particularly aware of this through something that happened when I was in India. In modern India, university members want to be like Westerners and they want to speak English. In fact, it is language that marks the difference between those who have an education, who go to university, and the "poor devils" of the country. I said to a friend of mine who was an outcast, one of the people but who wanted to study: You must learn to use the word "I," because in your language you never say, "I," but you say, "we." I imagined that, after three or four sociological and grammatical explanations, I would have convinced this young man who so wanted to study to say "I." When I asked him, "Have you understood," he replied, "We have understood!"

On the other hand, in the West, we are proud of this individualism of ours, which has had far-reaching consequences. This is demonstrated by an important philosophical example. When the great theologians wanted to describe that divine mystery that they had decided to call "God" (not the only name but in any case it represents a real symbol), they described it as "totally other." Being totally other is different, superior, something else; it is not like

us wretched mortals. God is that reality that is different and superior to us, *transcendental*, which is the philosophical word for saying the same thing. In many Oriental languages, at least all the Indian languages, "God" is not the different, not the other, superior, different thing that is above; God is so infinite that He cannot be separated from anything and is also found there where He is not believed in. God is total and absolute immanence. He is so implicated, so integrated, so included in the whole of reality that I cannot extract nor abstract Him. *Brahman* has none of these qualities that we attribute to God: he is not transcendent, he is not concerned with things and leaves them to take their course, he has no qualifications and is within all levels of reality. These are two different conceptions, which then lead to historical and transcendental misunderstandings that are hard to overcome between two differing cultures.

The fear of a certain Christian orthodoxy, for example, is pantheism, which, in my opinion, is true in what it says but imperfect because it does not say enough. Everything is divine; God is not extraneous to anything and is not even substance because a "substantial" God cannot be in all places. This is the great revelation of the Trinity that was later obscured. The Trinity is not tritheism and means that God is relationship and we are also in this relationship, together with the world, matter, the body. God the Trinity is not substance and can be in all places without falling into the pantheism of identifying divinity with all this. The whole of reality is divine but the divine also transcends this identity.

Interculturality Is a Historical Imperative

Modernity, with its presumption of tolerance, considers cultures to be more or less folklore and thus tolerates that the other may dress according to his fashion, cook and eat his different foods, but it does not realize that these different attitudes regarding what is real is not all there is to other cultures; they are different forms of life and different ways of seeing and experiencing reality. Therefore, I believe that interculturality is the most important historical and cultural imperative for the survival of our humanity—interculturality as the respect for different or even contradictory forms. It is curious that such an unquestionable authority as Thomas Aquinas states that God desires inequality and difference.

The dream of globalization is deeply rooted in humanity. One of the first examples can be found in the sixth chapter of the first book of the Bible: the episode of the Tower of Babel. The well-intentioned men of Babel (those in favor of globalization do not have bad intentions; they want to help others, but in their way) wanted to construct a huge tower-civilization where a minimum of cooperation could reign among its inhabitants. And this time YHWH was not wrong when he destroyed the tower and confused the languages, because he did not want a universal construction of a more or less unified world. He wanted small huts of human dimensions where people could speak their own dialect and understand each other so as to achieve collaboration and harmony among the different colors, the different cultures, which are exactly what make up the richness and appeal of this universe. Basically, the phenomenological characteristic of colonialism is monoculturalism. With the very best intentions we think that our categories, our democracies, and our science are universal acquisitions for humanity. We are frightfully provincial and we do not realize it. Science is not universal; it has very concrete premises and has deeply changed our attitude and approach to reality, to the point that, in the West, the majority of people who know how to read and write think that time is uniform and believe that the astronomers' light years correspond to electronic clock time. When I speak to people, I invite them to wake up to this indoctrination. "Do you think that an hour of anguish, an hour of dreams, an hour of pleasure, an hour of waiting,

or an hour of pain are all sixty minutes long? That they are the same thing? That time is an external reality?"

There are also many theologians who believe that eternity comes after death. "After time" is still a temporal category. To believe that eternity comes after time means to think with these parameters that have colonized the mind, as if eternity were equivalent to a very long time. I once comforted a lady with Catholic scruples who accepted the whole of Catholicism except hell. I began to expound this argument about time, but I then realized that her mind-set was not ready for philosophical disquisitions. "What is it that worries you about hell?" "That it has no end, that it is so long and with never-ending torture." "And if it only lasted for a year instead of such a long time?" "Well, in that case . . ." "If it only lasted for a month?" In reality, hell does not even last for five minutes, it is something altogether different. . . .

Eternity does not come after time; it is of a different nature. I have introduced the word "tempiternity," which is not an eternity after time, or a time that is never ending, but the discovery of in-temporal moments in the passing of time, which is also a reality. Real time (here I will hazard a philosophical statement) is the present, future time is a projection, and past time is a memory. They are not as real as the present is, and he who cannot enjoy the present is running away from reality. He who only lives for tomorrow, for the future, for eschatology, does not live real life. We have lost this experience of the present in which everything is tempiternally concentrated. I am *now* thanks to what I was before and what I will be thanks to what I am. Yet reality is tempitern, unique, incomparable in every instant, in every moment. A historical church father (Symeon the New Theologian, tenth century) says, "He who does not live eternal life now will live no more." The eternal life of the Gospels is not the everlasting *bios*; it is the eternal *zoe* that does not finish in temporality.

If time were a freeway, those who died halfway did not get to where they could have arrived. If, on the other hand, time is this tempiternity that I am trying to describe, then the victims of history, without detracting from the responsibility of our cruelty, do not represent a tragedy, because one day or another, every being is destined to die. It depends on us whether the form is violent, but I do not think that the victims of history are a special case of the human being's temporality. Eschatology is neither historical nor temporal. Of course, I am not insensitive to the historical tragedies of this world, and it is a colossal scandal that half of humanity lives on less than two dollars a day when others are rolling in money. Yet I do not want to allow these facts to lead me to desperation, nor do I want to call them tragedies. As Solzhenitsyn has demonstrated in his novels, even in a concentration camp life can be human, and in the same way torturers can lose that power of menace that springs from fear. You can kill me, but . . . you have no real power over my life (*zoe*, not *bios*). In every man there is something divine over which nobody can exert a threat. This is where the power of faith lies. We should, however, be mindful of St. Augustine's warning: *Ut sis, transcede tempus*. So that you can be, transcend time. To be, we must transcend time, and this is tempiternity.

By way of confirmation, one could cite the experience of all of those who have lived in the southern hemisphere: these poor people, exploited by the first world, despite everything, appear to be happy (attention, this is not a justification!). Thus, I would like to renew the invitation to experience time, not to be slaves to time—to transcend it and live every moment as if it were the last. We do not live authentically; we slide along the path of time thinking that tomorrow will be a better day and we forget the evangelical expression "Today you will be with me in Paradise," not tomorrow. In any human event experienced with awareness, I discover this tempitern core that allows me to live and be happy. Tempiternity does not remove the temporality from human events, but in any case there is more. We have lost the ability to enjoy daily moments of silence, of meditation. We are in a hurry to know everything; we no longer

know how to stop. Without contemplation we cannot reach the greatness of Man. Therefore, without the third eye, without this third dimension, mysticism, which we have relegated to the specialists, one cannot live a *human* life. Human life cannot be measured by the clock.

What I say about time is also valid for space. I do not live in a large box where I try to find the space for freedom. I "am" space just as I "am" time. This statement contrasts with the mind-set of our times dominated by the scientific paradigm, which is magnificent and valid in its field but which we cannot extrapolate. Its influence is such that, for Western culture, which I in no way wish to denigrate or consider unimportant, the essence of a thing is its difference, what the philosophers call "specific difference." In other cultures, the essence is not the specific difference, that which distinguishes it. And to get to the essence of something implies not so much seeing the differences as abandoning oneself to that holistic, total vision, which embraces without needing to know all the details: an intuition that allows us to perceive the totality of things. And I think that without this holistic vision, this undivided, global vision, we cannot live an authentic human life.

A Heroic Transformation

The problem of the other requires a heroic transformation for which we are all coresponsible. The historical period of reform that consists in the attempt to reform our system by eliminating the many aspects that we do not like has come to an end. It is not morality that will save the world. Those who have no patience think that with *de-formation*, namely with violence (revolution) or destruction, it will be possible to create something new. Reform does not work; de-formation is counterproductive and unacceptable. What is needed is a *transformation*, which is the same as a radical change in the way we think and live. For the intellectuals this is an enormous responsibility. We cannot simply wash our hands of the matter and say it is not any of our business. This heroic transformation means that we have to turn our value systems upside down. Basically it is an invitation to responsibility and freedom. The great message that Christ's message brings to humanity, not the only or the first one but that he insists on, is this freedom. "You were called to freedom," says St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians, and freedom does not tolerate laws. One must try to understand this inspired symbiosis between two extraordinarily powerful civilizations, both good and centuries old—that of Rome and the Jewish civilization that ontologized the law. So we even speak of divine law, which then implies mortal sin and so on. We only need to approach a different culture, that of two-thirds of humanity, and have a different conception of life, of reality, of time and space, to realize that this schema does not work. For example, in India a legislating God would be a blasphemy, the height of anthropomorphism. We cannot be free, but if we are, we are free to transgress even our own laws. A legislating God would not be free. The law is perfect, says St. Paul—it is freedom.

I would like to give another example, because sometimes examples can express more than words from a cultural point of view. In the majority of Oriental languages, at least in all the Indian languages, to say yesterday and tomorrow, or the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow, the same word is used. This implies that time is not linear, like a freeway that at some point goes toward the sky, or hell, or the void. The distance between yesterday and tomorrow is the same because I am the center of my time; I am time. Time is not external to me; it is not something that circulates independently from me. I remember when I was little and studying for my Catechism that spoke of the Last Judgment and of the Particular Judgment, I said to my mother, "It seems to me that the Particular and the Last Judgments coincide; we don't need to wait millions of years for the angels with their trumpets to raise

the dead." When I die, my time is over, and then the Last and Particular Judgments will be simultaneous (without at this point going further into the philosophical problems of simultaneity and synchronicity).

Radical, heroic transformation implies that the other's problem is also our problem. It is not a question of treating the other a little better; the attitude that springs from the awareness that the other is part of me is something totally different. This transformation requires, to quote an evangelical phrase that has worried me for many years, "*me antistanai to poner*," "*non resistere malo*," not to resist evil or the wicked, as it could be translated. Instinctively we want to go on a crusade against evil. Gandhi, who was not Christian, had understood this. During the revolt in Calcutta, a boy was killed by Muslims, and his parents wanted revenge. A man who was not a Christian asked Gandhi how they should have behaved. He replied, "Take a Muslim boy whose parents have been killed by the Hindūs and bring him up as if he were your child in the Muslim religion and tell him what happened to you." Only forgiveness, reconciliation, interrupts the law of *karma*, not an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Otherwise, as Gandhi joked, we would all have no eyes and no teeth!

Many years ago I wrote that only forgiveness can triumph over the law of *karma*, but forgiveness does not depend on me. I can avoid revenge, I can avoid doing harm through retaliation, but to forgive as the Scriptures (not only Christian) say is only the work of God. I once tried to convince two atheist friends of mine to forgive. After a while one of them came to see me and said, "You're clever and you're dangerous. You made me discover God. When I found the strength to forgive I experienced something superior to me that made it possible for me to forgive, because I couldn't do it alone. That's how I intuited God."

To reach, or at least get nearer to, an attitude of reconciliation, we need dialogue. However, dialogue presupposes one of the simplest but hardest things: listening. I cannot listen if I am full of myself, if I know what the other will say or if I criticize him even in the noblest sense of the word. The word that indicates listening (there is a wisdom of words) is obedience, *ob audire*. Are we willing to obey? This does not eliminate discernment, knowing how to distinguish between one thing and another, but if I am mindful that there is a divinity hidden in every person, I will be willing to listen to him. Perhaps the revelation of that missing part of myself will actually come from this enemy, from this other whom I do not understand. Listening means obedience, and so this *non resistere malo* acquires new meaning: it means that the true problem of the other is our problem, and as long as I see the other as a stranger, however many explanations I can come up with, I will not get to the bottom of anything. We believe too strongly in our individuality, our difference, and no longer live as a "community of us," which is neither a Marxist nor an egalitarian collective. The Christians would say that each one of us is unique part of the mystical Body of Christ; the Hindūs would say the mystical body of Śiva, of a humanity in which I am truly myself, but in an intrinsic relationship with you and with the "others" as part of a me that transcends me. I think that the work we have to do in ourselves to be worthy representatives of Western culture is to overcome these divisions in our thought. Only then, like a boomerang, the problem of the other will be transformed into our problem, and we have the possibility to contribute to this transformation in our hands.

Armed Reason

I would like to add some observations about language that has a far more feminine than masculine aspect and can also be used as a weapon: I talk to you to "con-vince." I argue to win over the other. Language ceases to be an act of love and becomes a struggle, a challenge. We are unable to coin a more loving form of language. In English, *intercourse* means dialogue, to speak

and to make love; the two go together. Therefore, language cannot be reduced to concepts as I have tried to explain; on the other hand, we have confused the word with its concept. The word is the word. When I was teaching theology I used to say that Christianity is not the religion of the book. There are no Christian books; the Holy Spirit was ironic enough to make sure that hardly any word exists that comes directly from Christ. St. Thomas lists three reasons why Christ left nothing in writing. First, because the great masters like Socrates and Pythagoras did not write on parchment but on the hearts of man. Second, because if He had left something in writing we would have fossilized ourselves on the words of the master by making it into a dogma and neglecting that which cannot be said in writing. Third, because he had such faith in men that he said, "I have spoken to you, now it is up to you." It is up to us to recapture the initial experience.

Going back to language, we need to repeat the experience that in every word there is a speaker to whom I must listen, a spoken word that I must try to understand, and a resonant instrument through which one speaks, because the word is just as material as it is spiritual. The word is also sound, matter; it is vibration. Hence the importance of the art of knowing how to listen: one does not listen to silence; one listens to words. And listening to words, one reaches silence, which springs up spontaneously.

I am convinced that nobody has a monopoly over words. Every word is always a dialogue. It speaks to someone, and if I do not listen to the word it loses all power over me. There is a divine core in each of us. We cannot attain belief in God because we do not believe in ourselves: if you do not believe that you are divine and unique, you cannot believe in a God projected onto the outside. The awareness of our dignity is burdensome, but the word, according to the Vedas and St. John, was at the primordial beginning. It is the gift we can delight in. This gift has no master. We do need a certain common vocabulary or special language, but the plurality of languages, nature's different colors, and the power of different dialects are irreplaceable. During the years when attempts were being made to launch Esperanto, Chesterton said, "There are two things we cannot do in Esperanto: to pray to God and to make love." What is vital must arise spontaneously in each of us; it must be a continuous spontaneous creation. Creation is not an act of the past. It is ongoing, and he who is not amazed by the act of creation or is not proud to be a cocreator with the Creator does not know how to delight in love, and it eludes him. We should not forget that in the most traditional Catechism, *tristitia*, translated as sloth, is a capital sin. We should receive and delight in the wisdom of love. *Gaudium* is a form of knowledge, and precisely *gaudium de veritate*, joy is truth. To be able to delight in this love, which is inseparable from knowledge, a certain asceticism is necessary that leads to purity of the heart and helps to overcome the dichotomy between knowledge and love. Knowledge without love is a calculation, and love without knowledge is sentimentality.

Each of us is the mirror of the whole, as the old Greek idea of Man as a microcosm recalls. Everything is reflected in each part of us, and all of reality resides in each human being. This is why analytical thought cannot help and individualized thought is of no use. We must open the third eye, return to mysticism, regain our innocence, and adopt an outlook in which love is not inferior to knowledge.

PEACE AND INTERCULTURALITY

A Philosophical Reflection

*Man is a living [being] divine,
not measured with the rest of the living [beings] upon the earth,
but [measured] with those in heaven, who are called Gods.*

Corpus Hermeticum X.24

The fact that intercultural dialogue is topical in a large part of the contemporary world is encouraging. The intercultural question is increasingly recognized as essential if we are to rise to the challenges of our day.¹ We are by no means alone in facing this task, and it is in a spirit of brotherhood, therefore, that I attempt to inspire dialogue.²

Philosophy as an Overcoming of Cultural Boundaries, Both Horizontal and Vertical

Philosophy implies a conscious effort to transcend the limits of the empirical fact without neglecting it. Thinking transcends a certain *empeiria*, or empiricism. From the outside this statement may sound like an attempt to overstep the boundaries of a given status quo. The philosopher questions, doubts, and often appears as a troublesome figure who seems to be constantly dissatisfied with the dominant culture of every historical period—although dissatisfaction should not be mistaken for pessimism. *Philosophus semper est laetus*, wrote Ramon Llull in his *Liber proverbiorum*. When the philosopher (the intellectual, some would say) ceases to be the consciousness of a people, he betrays his calling, his destiny, his *karman*.

It is culture itself, in fact, that represents the boundaries that the philosopher feels compelled to overstep. The philosopher has a fascination for the unknown. He is drawn by mystery; he dares to inquire into the unusual, and consequently often investigates into what seems, from the outside, to be "noninvestigable." Generally, however, the philosopher deals

* First appeared as *Pace e Interculturalità. Una riflessione filosofica*, ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (Milan: Jaca Book, 2002, reprinted 2006).

¹ The bibliography on the subject is vast, and it is important to be acquainted with it. Since it is so easy today to access information, I will not add notes to these pages, but for the sake of brevity I will merely make a few references to some of my previous works. See the brief summary of the subject that I wrote as a sort of manifesto, which could be used as a prologue to this chapter—*L'incontro indispensabile: dialogo delle religioni* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2001).

² It is a positive sign of our times that the United Nations proclaimed the year 2001, at the very beginning of the new millennium, the Year of Dialogue between Civilizations and that UNESCO organized a series of meetings to discuss this subject. It is also significant that Doudou Diène, director of UNESCO's Division of Intercultural Dialogue, pointed out that "interreligious dialogue is a crucial dimension of the dialogue among civilizations and cultures."

with problems within the scope of his own culture and, in so doing, increases its breadth and depth—he moves, that is, in an intracultural dimension. Nevertheless, the true philosopher dialogues constantly. The solitude of the philosopher is not the isolation of the individual closed up in himself. The philosopher converses with another, who, in some way, represents a different world, or at least a different point of view. Calculation does not need dialogue, but philosophy, unless we reduce it to mere algebra, cannot be a monologue. Philosophy consistently represents the effort of going beyond ourselves to cross the boundaries of what we know—and, ultimately, what we are. Knowledge is prompted by something that transcends epistemological curiosity.

The philosopher strives to know because he knows that he does not know. Otherwise he would be satisfied with what he knows. This desire to know is, in itself, an opening up to transcendence. In this sense, any philosophy that has overcome the analytic obsession of modern times is itself a transcultural attempt, since we philosophize by dialoguing with another, and consequently, philosophy becomes intercultural—because by speaking with another I go beyond the sphere of my own individual culture into the intercultural field, which at times I help to create. I assume, of course, that the other party is a living person, a source of consciousness, and not a computerized mind.

Every living culture creates tradition, and it is tradition that constitutes the body of the culture in which people live. Tradition, however, should not be identified solely with its eidetic contents. Certainly, tradition transmits ideas, but it also transmits feelings, points of view, fashions, and so on. Tradition, moreover, is itself transmission; it implies the act and manner of transmitting. There is, for example, an essential difference between written and oral transmission (the word is a great deal more than its conceptual content); between information received through television and transmission received personally; between transmission from parents to children and news or orders issued by a military, economic, or government organization.

When a tradition ceases to transmit, it ceases to be a tradition and betrays its own nature. When the elders of a society stop transmitting because they are no longer listened to, tradition dies—though the archetypes of the elders linger much longer in the historical memory (a fact that modern individualism tends to forget). What enables interculturality is the fluidity of culture, which has hitherto been accomplished through personal relations, the peaceful osmosis of ideas, commercial dealings, military invasions, and so on. With the mass displacement of immigrants and refugees, and the circulation of information through today's means of communication, interculturality is now becoming a far-reaching phenomenon—and a problem.

These boundaries are defined both by time and space—and here the contribution of the "sociology of knowledge" is indispensable. Man's actual knowing, and not merely what he knows, is conditioned (at least in part) by time and space. Along with cultural history there is a cultural geography that is all too often overlooked. The Islam experienced by North Africans, for example, is different from that experienced by Indian Muslims. The ultimate reason for the boundaries of philosophy, however, must be sought in the very limitations of the human being. We are, in fact, limited beings—yet with an innate desire to rise up higher and higher, beyond the outermost limits, as it is so exquisitely portrayed in certain ancient cartographies in which man leans out with half his body to discover what is beyond his world, and strives to venture *plus ultra*. The philosopher, in fact, is concerned with every kind of transcendence—the beyond, the invisible, the infinite, the unknown, the absolute, the void, nothingness, the divine. The philosopher is one who listens (to reality) and asks questions. Every question is itself an opening up to the transcendent—at least epistemologically. A

question about any "thing" itself implies a certain transcending of the thing we know, which we see as the bearer of an enigma yet to be unraveled.

This aspiration to transcendence provides common ground for intercultural dialogue—yet I must immediately correct the metaphor here, since transcendence is not "ground," but air, sky, atmosphere, a place where none can set foot. Transcendence is not a concept, but a symbol. By its very nature, transcendence is the realm of freedom, inasmuch as it eludes all definition—though as soon as we open our mouths we are back in our own culture and can do no more than mutter words about transcendence. We speak in our own language about something (transcendent) that the other party speaks about his own language. Inevitably, we come up against horizontal boundaries, that is, the culture of the other party.

The history of human thought reveals a twofold tendency. The first is a centrifugal tendency, predominantly masculine, that is geared to conquest, although the words used may be "mission," "education," "inculturation," "civilization," "persuasion," and other religious, political, and economic expansionist movements, which imply an epistemological and also metaphysical background. This is the tendency toward objectification. The object (*ob-iectum*) is launched like a missile during a strategic incursion into foreign territory. By this I do not mean that such a tendency is negative or violent. I am simply pointing out the existence of this tendency, which is typical especially of Western civilization and, in its general aspect, dates back thousands of years. We might call it the *plus ultra* tendency. It was not so much the fact of having ships that led the Europeans to sail around the Earth, arriving as far as Asia and America; it was more the compulsion they felt toward every form of discovery that drove them to develop their means of transport.

The other tendency, which I would refer to as feminine (although it is inseparable from the first, as the masculine is from the feminine), is the centripetal, inward tendency. This movement, which enables us to be penetrated and even fecundated by another, is an inclination toward imitation and assimilation, often made attractive by such names as "progress," "modernization," or "growth." Again, this does not mean it is negative or inferior; I am simply noting its existence. Eastern civilization has demonstrated this *plus intra* tendency for thousands of years. The Asian people have cultivated introspection and self-knowledge to a greater extent, not so much because they lacked the technologies needed for a different way of life, as because they strongly felt drawn toward interiority.

Today we see more clearly the need for symbiosis between these two basic human dynamisms, which, in actual fact, coexist within the heart of every culture, and which contemporary interculturality can help to balance.

Nonetheless, once philosophy goes beyond the solipsistic monologue, it automatically becomes intercultural, because every interlocutor is a world, just as every man is a source of knowledge and, for this very reason, lives in a world that does not need to be *exactly* like his own.

And yet the interculturality that interests us is something more than dialogue with our neighbor. With our neighbor we usually enter into an *intracultural* relationship, because it is culture that provides us with the normal space for human coexistence. Properly speaking, *intercultural* dialogue takes place with a stranger, who, in the modern world, may be our geographic neighbor or, as is often the case, the immigrant, the refugee, or those who are distant. Interculturality does not refer to preferences or opinions (in the classical sense) that can be traced to the various individual or collective presuppositions within a common culture. The interculturality of intercultural philosophy has more to do with the basic opinions and dogmas (again in the classical sense) of the respective cultures. In other words, problems relating to interculturality demand dialogue, but they cannot be solved through dialectical dialogue, which implies the acceptance of a very particular form of rationality that might

not be shared by the interlocutor.³ There are, for example, in the world (including Europe), populations that claim self-determination, thus threatening the unity of the state; these populations are denied dialogue unless they accept the indissolubility of the state. They are not allowed to overstep the horizontal boundaries.

Dialectical dialogue implies the rationality of a mutually accepted logic as judge of the dialogue, a judge that is above the parties involved. Dialectic, however, can be understood in another way—not as the confrontation of two *logoi* (individuals) in a knightly combat before the unappealable court of the Goddess Reason, but rather as a *legein* (meeting) of two “dialoguing parties” who listen to each other, and listen in order to understand what the other person is saying and, especially, what they mean. I call this second form of dialectic *dialogal dialogue*. I must confess here that I have used indiscriminately the adjectives “dialogical” and “dialogal.” The distinction lies in the more academic connotation of the former and the more personalistic character of the latter. At any rate, this type of dialogue should be distinguished from the “dialectical” type—despite the ambivalence of the word in Greek philosophy.

Ultimately, the horizontal boundaries of a dialectical encounter cannot be separated from the vertical limits of a dialogal encounter. There is no earth without sky, and no human environment without air above it to make it breathable and, therefore, human. To put it more academically, every text has its context, and every philosophy has its own atmosphere and its own symbols of transcendence.

Summing up, we may say that the horizontal boundaries of every culture are determined by the cultures of others, while the vertical boundaries are not established by others but are created by the human condition itself. Only by acknowledging our limits can we avoid absolutizing our convictions and allow ourselves to listen to and, if possible, understand the other.

When intercultural dialogue excludes a priori the vertical boundary of any culture, it runs a great risk of being transformed into a horizontal “duel”—the only way out, in other words, is by defeating the other. When this dialogue is interrupted, war begins. This happens when religions become mere ideologies—as we can see in the tension between the Western world and Islam today, or between Jainism and Hinduism in the Indian continent centuries ago. The vertical boundaries of every culture do not have the same limits as the horizontal boundaries, but they are limited nonetheless, though they build no stone walls, barbed-wire fences, customs barriers, or economic enclosures. This means that every dialogue, whether consciously or not, has a religious aspect. These boundaries are marked by the basic beliefs of every culture.

Interculturality Is Neither Transdisciplinarity nor Multiculturalism

We have just seen that intercultural philosophy is something more than a mere conversation with our neighbor. It represents an incursion into the unknown land and sky in which the stranger lives.

And here I should make an observation.

The dominant culture of today, which is of European origin, has penetrated so extensively (I do not say deeply) into the planetary atmosphere that very often the so-called stranger is someone who has already been colonized by this dominant culture.

³ See R. Panikkar, *The Dialogical Dialogue*, in *The World's Religious Traditions*, ed. F. Whaling (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984), 201–21.

In this context it is important to distinguish *interculturality* from both *interdisciplinarity* and *transdisciplinarity*.

The boundaries overstepped by interculturality cannot be reduced to those crossed by interdisciplinarity, which strives legitimately to surpass the "barbarism of specialization." *Interdisciplinarity* concerns the relationship and the mutual enrichment of the various disciplines—disciplines whose meaning lies within the same culture of which they are, precisely, its disciplines, specialties, or in-depth studies. *Transdisciplinarity* goes a step further. It lays claim not to the cultivation of the various disciplines (*multidisciplinarity*) but to an opening up to "something" (ineffable and indefinable) that intersects and surpasses each specific discipline. Cultures, nevertheless, are more than disciplines.⁴

Interculturality does not concern disciplines as much as cultures, and cultures are not of a "metacultural" type but regard, rather, the much-discussed human nature. Indeed, as we said at the beginning, the nature of Man is cultural. Man is a cultural animal, yet for this very reason, when such culture is not a purely formal concept, it is invariably interpreted according to the categories of a particular culture—as the discussions on "natural law" and "natural religion" demonstrate all too clearly.

Today we are slowly returning to the old *studium generale* and to a greater awareness of the complementarity of disciplines. Despite this, however, we have not yet *reached* interculturality. It is important here to point out the danger of extrapolating the interdisciplinary method for the purpose of applying it to intercultural studies; this would be wrong, seeing that the latter belong to a different order. Every culture is a galaxy that lives by its own *mythos* (to avoid the pejorative sense of the word "myth"), in which what we call goodness, truth, beauty, and even reality take on a concrete sense. I use the word "sense" rather than "meaning" to avoid it being identified with conceptual meaning. Something may "make sense" to us, and yet we may find it meaningless. Likewise, the word "sense" can also have similar limitations. All words have cultural backgrounds that we must respect and be aware of if we are to avoid falling into the trap of "multiculturalism." Multiculturalism still reveals the colonialist syndrome, which consists in believing that there exists a culture superior to all others, a metaculture, capable of offering them benevolent, condescending hospitality. Something that is different from this but also sometimes defined as multiculturalism is the tolerance of a state toward subcultural, folkloristic, or accidental forms belonging to different ethnic groups. Canadian society, for example, proudly regards itself as "multicultural" for the fact that it tolerates "many cultures," which have been reduced to a collection of outward manifestations of the life of the different ethnic groups. All of them, however, must obey the laws of the state—laws that make "sense" within the context of a given culture and a certain lifestyle.

We must insist on these differences, because the undeniable success of the Western civilization that has spread throughout the world can easily lead us to believe that we are approaching a one-world culture—whether we call it "global village," "globalization," "science and technology," "democracy," or suchlike. This does not detract from the immense value of the cultural achievements of the Western world. The challenge of interculturality is simply a challenge against the monopoly of a single culture over the universal heritage of mankind.⁵

⁴ See the many works by Barasab Nicolescu, especially *La Transdisciplinarité* (Munich: Rocher, 1996), which makes a distinction between multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary—the latter being the closest in meaning to our idea of interculturality (albeit in the cultural field of modern science).

⁵ See D. de Vallescar, *Cultura, multiculturalismo e interculturalidad. Hacia una racionalidad intercultural* (Madrid: P.S. Editorial, 2000), for a recent description of the complex problems and the various works of the "international society of intercultural philosophy."

We have described culture as the incorporating myth of a society, and it is difficult to leave one's own myth, because it is myth itself that offers a horizon of intelligibility to those who live within it.⁶ It is practically impossible, therefore, to break away from one's own myth without an intercultural contribution. The modern world, for example, has relativized (in many cases not without reason) all the cosmologies of the other cultures, but absolutized its own. It may be disturbing, but also liberating, to discover that other cultures have a different conception of matter, time, and space, for example, and therefore also of Man and the meaning of life.

The intercultural dialogue is formed in conversation between people and not merely between individuals, because it is not simply a question of an individual dialogue between two human beings freed from their background and their history, but of an osmosis between two visions of reality, or rather, two worlds represented, so to speak, by two human persons carrying with them the full weight (the histories) of their culture. And since the soul of every culture is religion, the intercultural dialogue ultimately leads to an interreligious dialogue.

Intercultural philosophy does not seek to provide a "multicultural" answer to problems considered to be "universal," but questions the alleged universality of the problems themselves.

The hidden danger of "multiculturalism" lies in the claim that it is possible to understand the cultures from a superior perspective defined as "multicultural." Other cultures do not merely have visions of the world that are different from that of the dominant culture (that which acts as a paradigm for understanding them); they represent as many different worlds—not a different vision of the world, but a whole other world.

We can easily accept that there are other forms of thought, but we forget that these forms of thought make it possible to live in other worlds. The example of time may help to give us a clearer idea. The predominant conception of time in the West and the Westernized world is of a parameter that is homogeneous with the space in which we move and live. Take, for example, Dogen's rich and complex idea of *uji*, which liberates us from obsession with the past, present, and future.

There is no such thing as a multicultural point of view because every culture presents a different perspective. So-called multiculturalism is, at best, a new culture, even though it calls itself "super-culturalism." There is, however, an intercultural point of view, or vision, which, without being schizophrenic (this is the danger), seeks to understand the various contexts that justify their respective points of view. Not even interculturality, however, can use two languages at the same time. Each language conditions our way of thinking and provides the context in which the words take on full meaning—beyond that of a merely conceptual nature.

Intercultural Attitudes

Every man lives in a culture that is, to some degree, closed, but he is aware that there exist other men who have a different conception of life. A natural reaction to this, as history teaches us, is self-assertion at the expense of the other, who is defined as barbarian, savage, pagan, infidel, unbeliever, *goy*, *khafir*, *mleccha*, and so on. Little by little, we do also discover the values of the other, though usually within the parameters of our own culture.

From a cultural point of view this encounter may be broken down into five stages:⁷

⁶ See R. Panikkar, *Sobre el sentido del mito*, in *Diccionario de las mitologías*, ed. Y. Bonnefoy (Barcelona: Destino, 2001), 5:19–55.

⁷ See the Prologue by R. Panikkar in J. Langlais, *Le Bouddha et les deux bouddhismes* (Montréal: Fides, 1975), 11ff.

1. *Isolation and ignorance.* Every culture lives within its own context, and the problem of interculturality does not even arise.
2. *Indifference and contempt.* When contact becomes inevitable, the first reaction is to think that the *other* culture has nothing to do with us; at the most it is regarded as a harmless rival.
3. *Condemnation and conquest.* If the relationship becomes more stable and lasting, the *other* culture begins to be seen as a threat to react against and, if possible, suppress.
4. *Coexistence and communication.* Victory is never total, and the cultures discover that they have to tolerate each other. The *other* culture thus becomes a challenge or an oddity.
5. *Convergence and dialogue.* Confrontation is frequently followed by convergence and the discovery of a possible mutual influence. The *other* culture starts to become the other pole of our own and, perhaps, its enrichment.

If we are to speak of interculturality, we must adopt a criterion that will allow us to proceed with a certain method in the study of the various cultures. This criterion cannot belong to one single culture; it must be supra-cultural. In this sense it is possible to consider a metacultural value in relation to the different cultures.

From a more philosophical than historical standpoint, meanwhile, we can distinguish three different attitudes:

1. "There is one Truth, one Reality, and one Absolute that provides us with the standard and the criterion for evaluating all cultures." In a Christian context this might be the "theology of fulfillment" (or the "culmination" of Christianity in relation to the other religions); in a political field it is known as "colonialism" (today called globalization); in a scientific field we may refer to the theory of evolution; in a philosophical field, the still-prevalent concept of philosophy as *opus rationis*, as the product of reason, a purely rational activity; in the field of cosmology, the so-called scientific vision of the universe, and so on.

This attitude, which gives us the parameters for evaluating other cultures, acts as a superior yardstick.

Where and how we might find this Truth, or whatever it may be, is of course a problem. Paradoxically, the more antimetaphysical a "positivistic" attitude may be, the more it tends to apply criteria of a so-called pragmatic, realistic, humble, and even flexible nature in passing universal judgments on other cultures—thus converting metaphysics into "hyper-physics." "Multiculturalism" that postulates what should be the roles of the different cultures is another example.

The other extreme of the same attitude is cultural axiomatism in all its forms. Algorithmic "thought," for example, cannot tolerate an error once it has been detected: $2 + 2 = 4$, and only 4. It would be wrong, and also incorrect, for example, to affirm that $2 + 2 = 4.01$. The statement "error has no rights" supports this attitude; truth is objective, and whoever denies this is accused of subjectivism or relativism. And here we have another example of dialectic thought: to deny that truth is objective is not the same as saying it is subjective.

This attitude states that we must certainly respect other cultures but we have the right and the duty to evaluate these cultures on the basis of absolute criteria—criteria that may be revealed, rational, objective, evident, majority, or whatever, but are always supra-cultural.

In short, interculturality is subject to an absolute supra-cultural criterion that is in the hands of those who in some way believe in this criterion. Consequently, dialogue on an equal level is not possible. How can human appeal oppose divine revelation? Yet being subject, nevertheless, to human interpretation, it causes serious problems: in human hands

the absolute becomes relative. Even though we may say that this so-called revelation is itself "revealed," a correct understanding of the interpretation should also be revealed; otherwise each could understand it in his own way. As post-Medieval scholasticism has already taught us, the infallibility of the *ecclesia docens* (teachings), for example, implies the infallibility of the *ecclesia discens* (the Christian people). Infallibility cannot be an individual privilege if it is to have meaning for others also. In this example, the Church is the "subject" of infallibility.

There is no doubt that this attitude provides us with a yardstick that allows us to classify and also understand cultures in our own way. This, for example, is the strength of monotheism. When the absolute is accepted, in practice or in theory, we can arrive at a certain agreement. Social Darwinism enables countries self-defined as "developed" to believe they are superior without pride and without contempt for others that are merely "developing."

This attitude finds its most sophisticated expression, perhaps, in so-called *Philosophia perennis*. This Absolute does not belong to the Church or to a human group, but is the heritage of the primordial tradition of mankind whose origin lies above it, whose most fitting name is "Divinity," and whose sphere is metaphysics. From this standpoint, therefore, it criticizes all cultures that, like our so-called modernity, have moved away from the primordial tradition.

The weak side of *Philosophia perennis* is potential immobilism and the absolutization of tradition, which fails to take into account the very wisdom of the words used: "*perennis*" does not mean staticity, but regular appearance *per annos*, and "tradition" ceases to be such if it does not "transmit" from generation to generation and is not incarnated in time and space.

2. The Absolute is defined: "There is a metaphysical Truth, but this Absolute takes on different appearances in different cultures." This leads us to ask the fundamental question in its most varied forms: What is God? What is Being? What is Reality? What makes us ask questions? What must be done at a given time? What is knowledge? What gives meaning to life? Who am I? How can we deliver ourselves from suffering? How can we overcome death? How can we achieve happiness? and so on. It is obvious, then, that multiple questions must correspond to multiple answers.

In short, there is no doubt that cultural plurality exists, and each culture has its own claim to Truth. How can we coordinate them all? We proceed, then, to catalogue or classify these and other similar questions. And in this lies the great power and the great temptation of the human mind—the great power of abstract conceptual thought, and the temptation of identifying thought with abstraction, thus turning thought into a pure calculation of abstract data. Galileo had good reason to claim that Nature is written in mathematical script; all we need to do, then, is learn how to read it. Classification is the great tool of modern science and the speciality of the West. A typical example is the use of the computer—we "feed" data, along with a code for "reading" them, into the machine, and it "assimilates" this data and returns to us the results of a calculation, however sophisticated it may be. Classification implies the conviction that reality can be broken down into homogeneously individualizable parts—whether they be people, atoms, or whatever.

Nevertheless, we are not able to classify ultimate questions, because we lack an ultimate platform that can provide us with a classification meta-criterion, since the very criterion we adopt depends on the philosophy we follow. Philosophy cannot be reduced to a form of axiomatics or algebra without ceasing to be what it has been since the very moment we began to use the word *philosophia*, the love of knowledge.

Here we must clarify one point. It would be absurd to rail against abstraction; we are making ample use of conceptual thought in this very context. Not all abstraction, however, is conceptual; there exists, for example, a form of artistic abstraction that cannot be reduced to concepts. Yet the concept is essential to a certain type of thought. I spoke earlier of "ultimate"

questions, assuming that the adjective "ultimate" has a transcultural meaning. Its meaning, however, is purely *formal*, since it totally excludes the content of the questions. Conceptual thought is like scaffolding that allows us to construct a solid building, but the scaffolding is not the building, nor should the building be mistaken for the whole of reality. Reality is not necessarily subordinate to mere conceptual thought, nor thought to a dialectic play of ideas.

In short, interculturality is subject to an abstract supra-cultural criterion of a formal nature, which is precisely the temptation of philosophers, who debate about the interpretations and concrete applications of general principles. For example, we must do good and avoid evil, but what actually is good, and how do we avoid evil in each specific situation? Reason will tell us, but reason itself is understood by different cultures in very different ways. The supra-cultural criterion must, therefore, be based on a conceptualizing type of reason—abstract, formal reason that can be theoretically reduced to quantifiable parameters.

While the first attitude judges the various cultures according to how close they are to "absolute Truth," based on a criterion furnished by this same truth, the second subjugates cultures to the court of Reason, based on a criterion provided by reason itself. Appeal is made, then, to pure formal or abstract reason, presuming it to be neutral.

The common classification of cultures into primitive, developed, prelogical, shamanic, mythical, and so on is the clearest example of this. Yet what may be myth or development to one culture does not correspond to what another culture means by these words, nor is the criterion the same.

3. "There may be an Absolute, but by its very nature it is transcendent and, therefore, transcends all our concepts and ideas of it." Consequently, this absolute cannot be the premise for any deduction, the major premise of any syllogism. Are we forced, then, into utter silence? Into solipsism? By no means, since such an approach would lead to another extreme and, ultimately, another form of absolutism. Interculturality requires us to open up to the other, since on our own we cannot decide what are the fundamental questions—or even be sure that the ultimate task of philosophy is to ask questions and choose the right answers. Might it not rather be to listen? Or simply to teach how to live—or lead the way to enlightenment? We cannot, however, fulfill this task without abandoning our concrete intellectual assumptions. Here again, we cannot rely on an analogy of concepts that is based on a *primum analogatum* or problematic common referent. This is the place of *mythos*, as we will see later.

A discussion on interculturality cannot overlook such problems. What, then, is the connection between the various cultures of the world? We have no absolute criterion, and interculturality makes us skeptical about the possibility of an agreement, a sort of "cultural contract" parallel to the social contract, because such an agreement is only possible within a myth, and every culture lives in its own myth. The distinction between *relativism* and *relativity* is fundamental. We can evaluate another culture only in the light of our own, even though we are aware that our criteria are not absolute. All we have left is dialogue with other cultures, but for this our concepts (being such because they have been conceived within our own culture) are inadequate—unless there is a conceptual communion, which is not always possible. For this reason, symbolic thought is of prime importance, being neither objective nor subjective, but essentially dialogal, as we will see presently. There is a *via media* between cultural absolutism and cultural relativism—this is *cultural relativity*. Intercultural philosophy strives to follow this middle path. Its method is dialogue as an opening up to the other.⁸ The predominant culture of the West has forgotten how—or does not believe it possible—to think in symbols (symbolically), and thinks instead in concepts (conceptually). Symbols

⁸ See Prabhu, *Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, 243–62.

are confined to artistic subjectivity and excluded from "scientific" objectivity—which is not negative as long as objectivity does not become the only criterion of truth.

Symbolic knowledge itself represents dialogue between the symbolizer and the symbol through the cognitive process of symbolization—which is not conceptualization.

Summing up, we may say that interculturality is subject to the criterion of the intercultural dialogue itself in its actual realization. The criterion is inherent to dialogue itself, and its interpreters are the dialoguing parties.

For example, to a large part of the Abrahamic cultures (Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Marxist, and scientific, albeit with their respective diversities), Man is a basically *historical* being, whose life develops in linear time. There is a temporal, historical, and also cosmic eschatology. The theatre of Man is history. To a large part of Asian cultures, Man is a fundamentally *temporal*, not historical being, whose life (to use a geometrical similarity) unfolds in spherical time. There is an exchange between the various worlds along a timeline that begins again at every moment or in every "cycle." The theatre of Man is the Cosmos; his appearance on this earth is merely an act of the "divine comedy." There is an essential difference between time (temporality) and history (historicity). How can these two cosmologies dialogue?

First of all, we must not begin by criticizing negatively from outside: "These Orientals have a lot of spirituality and a lot of peace, but they are poor and dirty, they do not know human rights, etc." It is useless to counterattack on the same level (the climate in New York is different from that of Kolkata—Calcutta—and a few years ago, forty thousand homeless people [probably even more today] slept in the streets . . .). True dialogue is not a way of letting off steam, much less a clash between two political parties. Even in the heart of Western culture, there are those who believe in a spiritual reality, just as in Asia there are those who believe that the only reality is material.

The first step consists in doing away with misunderstandings such as, for example, that history is not important or that the circularity of time means that the same events come around again "later" (which is not possible if time is circular) or that history cancels eternity or is the whole of reality. If we claim that Jesus is a historical character, the Christian will interpret it as real, but the Viṣṇuite as unworthy of his faith; likewise, if we claim that Kṛṣṇa is a nonhistorical character, the Viṣṇuite will interpret it as divinely real but the Christian as an object of mythical (in the negative sense of the word) faith.

The second step consists in explaining the respective visions in a way that is intelligible to each person in the dialogue—which, as we will see later, requires linguistic communication. If they are able to understand each other, they discover the similarity of the two conceptions within their respective contexts. This understanding is not conceptual (concepts may be incompatible) but symbolic—which implies a certain empathy and participation in a symbolic universe that is not exclusively epistemological.

The third step is *dia-logos* itself, or passing through *logos* to arrive at "that" which is *meant*, that which lies "behind" what the word reveals, the *res significata*, the referent. Thus is created a field in which discussion may continue on the basis of the mutually accepted criteria of truth—the *pramāṇa* of Indian tradition.

The dialoguing parties will then be able to reach a certain understanding or continue to believe that the other party is wrong, but they will identify the reasons for their different opinions and arrive at those fundamental options that constitute the wealth and the torment of the human condition.⁹

⁹ Cf. R. Panikkar, *Verstehen als Überzeugtsein*, in *Neue Anthropologie*, vol. 7 of the *Philosophische Anthropologie*, ed. H.-G. Gadamer and P. Vogler (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1975), 132–67.

In the field of human existence these three basically different attitudes do not exclude one another.

This leads us to emphasize once again that what is constitutive of Man is dialogue itself—which is not, therefore, merely a tool. Man, as such, is a dialogal being, not an isolated individual. Consequently, to claim that it is not possible to exclude dialogue from any kind of human problem is the same as saying that we cannot leave Man out of any matter regarding Man. Economics may, to a certain extent, prescind from the subject (who merely studies it), but the fact that it has led Man to believe in an “economic science” reduced to the study of financial laws in which the “order of human habitat” (*oikonomia*) is not an intrinsic part of this science is a sign of the degradation of a culture.

I am reminded of the example of Mahātmā Gandhi when, in a district of Calcutta, a bloody battle broke out between Hindūs and Muslims. He vowed that he would fast to the death if it did not stop. After three weeks, when he was now near death, the battle ended. When a distraught Hindū came to see him and sought to justify his desire for revenge by the fact that his two children had been killed, Gandhi's only reply was, “Go and find two Muslim orphans and adopt them as your children. Educate them in the Muslim religion and tell them about what happened.”

Dialogal and Duological Dialogue

The characteristic method of intercultural philosophy is the method of dialogal dialogue, in which the rules of the dialogue are not presupposed unilaterally, or taken for granted a priori without having established them in the dialogue itself. But how can we know how to proceed, if we do not know the procedure? Are we not falling into a vicious circle? The answer is that, as with any ultimate issue, we are not dealing with a vicious circle, but a vital circle. Human life cannot be reduced to a logical understanding of it.

The dilemma is basically always the same: How can we establish the rules of the dialogue if the dialogue cannot take place without them?

This dilemma presupposes the acceptance of the “principle of Parmenides,” which is the principle dogma of Western culture—the supremacy of Thinking over Being. I use the term “supremacy of Thinking over Being” because, although Parmenides affirms the identification of Thinking and Being, this identification is promulgated by Thinking and not by Being. In criticizing this principle I am not necessarily defending its dialectical opposite, unlike a certain form of existentialism that proclaims the supremacy of existence over essence (also within the context of a dualistic position). To do so would be to fall into the vicious circle of using a principle to criticize itself. I am not saying that the principle of Parmenides is not valid; I am saying that it is valid for Thought and that it cannot be attributed to Being without applying, a priori and groundlessly, the same principle: that what is valid for Thought is also valid for Being. A certain Vedānta (to maintain the parallelism) appears to accept the same principle but in the opposite sense: Being conditions Thought, and their identification is a postulate of Being, which, therefore, identifies with Thought or, more precisely, with consciousness. Both these attitudes lead to monism, of Being as of Thought.

However this may be, our dilemma concerns dialectical thought only: either we establish the rules of the game in advance or we cannot play. From a logical point of view this argument is flawless, but it places logical rationality before, or rather *above*, human reality. This is like saying that we will never be able to learn to speak if we do not know how to speak, but we will never know how to speak if we do not speak. Or, going back to Parmenides, thinking implies being, but this is a postulate, or an insight, of our thinking (*Cogito ergo sum*). Without

Thought there is no awareness of Being. Yet the fact that Being does not appear without the thought of Being, and that Thought implies Being, is a necessity of our thinking that we project onto Being because we cannot do otherwise. This thinking, however, involves Thought, not Being—unless we first presuppose their identity. Being, in other words, is not subject to the laws of Thought. In short: we can discover the a priori laws of our thinking (on the basis of Thought itself), but we cannot apply them to Being without transgressing the very laws of Thought itself.

There is a joke that may serve as an example to help illustrate what we are trying to explain. A policeman comes across a drunkard in the middle of the night looking for something under a street lamp.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

"I'm looking for my house key," the man replies.

"Did you drop it here?"

"No, but this is the only place where there's light!" (We are seeking the mystery of Being only under the "light" of Thought.)

We could object, saying, "What is Thought, then, if it does not think Being? Aristotle anticipated such an objection, and this is why he says that Thought thinks itself—*noësis noēsets*, the "thought of Thought." Indeed, this is the great temptation of all monotheism—monistic idealism, which eventually led to an equally monistic materialism. This has always been opposed by mysticism, which claims that being is unthinkable, and can only be spoken of because the word, *logos*, is not exhausted in thinking. Being is not thought about (understood, conceived, learned), but one is conscious of it; it is not "seen," but "heard" (to use a Greek and an Indian metaphor). The word speaks, but it is not word if we fail to hear it. "Faith comes by hearing" (Rom 10:17) ("*sit venia Pauli*"). *Logos* is not without *pneuma*, without spirit, just as Man is not without body. This would be the tripartite anthropology that Western Man forgot when he discarded the Trinity.

Man is not mind alone; consequently, philosophy, understood as that human activity that strives, using all means considered appropriate, to make sense of life and reality, cannot exclude a priori the existential participation of the body and the human action. Intercultural philosophy frees the post-Parmenidean philosopher from his mental cage or, more precisely, from his conceptual structure, saving the genius of Parmenides through a different possible interpretation of his poem.¹⁰

Coming back to our subject, what this tells us is that pure monologue cannot transcend itself. There must be dialogue—dialogue, however, that transcends dialectic and, therefore, alleged objectivity (taken to be the realm of logic that has detached itself from all subjects).

Dialogal dialogue is radically different from dialectical dialogue. It does not try to *convince*, that is, to dialectically win over the other party or even to seek with him a truth that is subordinate to dialectic. Dialectical dialogue presupposes the acceptance of an impersonal field of logic whose attributed or recognized authority or jurisdiction is purely "objective." Dialogal dialogue, on the other hand, presupposes a mutual trust in a shared venturing into the unknown, since it can neither be established a priori that the two parties will understand each other, nor assumed that Man is an exclusively logical being. The field of dialogal dialogue is not the logical *arena* of the battle of ideas, but, rather, the spiritual *agora* of the encounter of two beings who speak, listen, and possibly are conscious of being more than "thinking machines" or *res cogitans*. I say "possibly" because even dialogue with a "computerized" mind

¹⁰ See H. Padrutt, *Und sie bewegt sich doch nicht. Parmenides im epochalen Winter* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1991).

should not be excluded—while being careful, however, never to overlook the reductionist premises of such a mind. The conclusions will be valid only “as far as the dialogue goes.” We may enter the *arena*, but we must keep the invitation to the *agorà* open and not remain stuck in the *arena*. The *agorà* is for speaking, the *arena* is for battling. The above statements, however, do not in any way intend to promote an irrational position which, by its very nature, would not even be possible to formulate.

We have talked about the vital circle that breaks the vicious circle, yet there still remains the problem of dialogue when it is rejected by the other person, as often happens in conflicts between individuals or populations. Here the “rules” are not so much rules of procedure as existential attitudes. The dialogal dialogue demands an attitude of the whole person and not merely a strategy for establishing who is right. The dialogal dialogue sets no conditions and is vulnerable; it must be approached with trust in a common desire to delve into a certain Truth, Justice, or Understanding that surpasses us to the extent that it may be defined as religious (in the broad sense in which we use the word here).

The practice of the dialogal dialogue leads us to know in the same measure that we are known, and vice versa. “Then shall I know even as also I am known,” to borrow an expression from the Christian Scripture (1 Cor 13:12). The dialogal dialogue method presupposes, on one hand, a certain intention that goes beyond the specific interests of those taking part, which is commonly known as the “desire for truth,” though I prefer to call it an *aspiration to harmony or concord*—two words that are seldom found in modern philosophical dictionaries. “Concord” is the last word of the last mantra of the Rig Veda. I use the word “harmony” instead of the more cerebral “truth” because too often truth is regarded as an absolute, and we forget that truth, as such, is pluralistic (not plural), since it is a relationship involving two poles, one of which is our own. How many atrocities have been committed in the name of truth! How far we are from the ancient wisdom of the “*concordia discors*” and the “*discordia concors*” of the Greeks, the Latins, and the Renaissance thinkers! “*Tota haec mundi concordia, ex discordibus constat*” (All the concord of the world is the result of discord), Seneca wrote as he was studying the comets (*Naturales quaestiones* VII.27.4). Nature is a harmonious whole made up also of its own dissonances.

Dialogal dialogue also presupposes the superseding of the “epistemology of the hunter,” or the activity that focuses on hunting for information, and is carried out by “instrumental reason” that is disconnected from the rest of the human being and, especially, from love. The hunter must kill, or at least wound, his prey in order to catch it. This epistemology is separate from any form of ontology, as it became separate when modern Europe proclaimed its own “Age of Enlightenment” because it believed in the Goddess Reason—in rational reason.

Crossing cultural boundaries armed with the weapon of “pure” reason (i.e., reason alone) means giving way to an act of violence and cultural contraband. I would like to mention here the role of interculturality in translations of a more “ordinary” type, that is, the various resonances of the most common words, which, the more spontaneously they are used, the more they reveal the underlying culture. “Pure” reason implies reason that is uncontaminated by impurities from contact with the rest of Man—the body, feelings, love, and so on. But is “pure reason” really pure? Can it “function” separately from all the rest? Would dialogue then be impure, since it is not a monologue?

Yet this is not all. If dialogal dialogue is to be productive and not merely a rational lucubration, it cannot be limited to generally valid abstract formalisms, but it must enter the dialogue between the concrete cultures making contact. This real contact generally draws closer together two concrete cultures with their multiform aspects. Dialogue cannot be established through abstract principles such as “love one another”; it must be part of reality, and it must

have the courage to also include the colonialist who has ruined an entire population or the terrorist who has killed innocent victims. Discussion on dialogue, therefore, is not merely a theoretical discussion, although we must try to base it on anthropological foundations if we want it to be something lasting rather than a basically utilitarian strategy. Dialogue cannot be conducted abstractly and generally; it does not imply the vengeance of "an eye for an eye," but the courage of "eye to eye."

In this way, dialogue becomes *dialogal dialogue*. If a Jew wants to understand and be understood, he cannot use the same language when speaking to a Buddhist or to a Christian, nor can an Ibo use the same language if his interlocutor is a Maori or a Zapotec. A scientist cannot expect his language to be comprehensible to a poet, and so on. Christian "self-denial" may seem like masochism to a psychoanalytical mind, and the Buddhist *nirvāṇa* as quietistic fatalism to a modern-day politician. There are different linguistic universes, and every language is a world that translates a certain vision of reality. By mutual agreement of the parties involved, dialogal dialogue establishes both the subjects of the dialogue and the *agorà* in which it takes place.

Yet how can these dialoguing parties speak together if a common language cannot be established in advance? In the sphere of "pure" reason and knowledge without love, the question is insoluble—unless one side imposes dialectical language as an indispensable condition, which, however, would mean killing the dialogal dialogue. A true dialogue must be human, and Man is more than just reason. As Ramon Llull says in his *Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, "The bird sang in the orchard of the Beloved. The lover came and said to the bird: if we cannot understand each other through language, then let us understand each other through love, for in your song my Beloved appears before my eyes."¹¹

No dialogue is possible if we expect it to be purely objective and to totally exclude subjectivity from participation. Objectivity, when recognized as such, has the advantage of belonging to no one and the disadvantage of being ineffective, of not being binding for anyone, because it has not entered the human heart. Purely objective laws require police and hell, or at least fear and dread. On the other hand, neither is pure subjectivity itself dialogue, since it has practically eliminated *logos* to seek refuge in a sentiment that cannot be transferred to the other.

In other words, as it is not purely objective, dialogal dialogue does not exclude passion and feeling. It is difficult to dialogue with someone who has done wrong. It is difficult to dialogue with the fundamentalist who defends ideas that we consider to be completely erroneous. At the same time, however, since it is neither purely subjective, dialogue does not exclude rationality. Dialogal dialogue involves our whole being, therefore, and demands both a pure heart and an open mind. As I said earlier, I consider the practice of dialogal dialogue as a religious act par excellence.

These and other ethical questions cannot be overlooked, but neither can we ignore the problems of *logos* in dialogue.

Intercultural Language

The first problem with intercultural philosophy begins with a reflection on the meaning of actual words. Language is not intercultural unless it does not overcome the boundaries of its own culture. We cannot use any word as if it were intercultural by nature. As a first

¹¹ *Cantava l'aucell en lo verger de l'Amat. Venc l'amic qui dix a l'aucell. Si no'ns entenem per languages, entenem-nos per amor, car en el teu cant se representa a mos ulls mon Amat.*

example we take the two words we have been using, namely, "philosophy" and "culture."¹² There is no one notion of philosophy and culture, but fortunately language does not only use conceptual *terms*, which can be empirically verified (or falsified), it also uses *words* that are symbols expressing the collective experience of a people. Therefore they can be endowed with many different meanings.¹³ Interculturality looks for words with a transcultural significance. "Philosophy" might be an example.¹⁴

Taking a further step toward dialogical dialogue, we can add that the fundamental issue of intercultural philosophy arises precisely from the necessity of finding, in reciprocal agreement, the basis of the dialogue, that is, the problem is language. It is clear that this mutual quest must be carried out through speaking, using one's own language not simply in the sense of grammatical correctness but also as a form of thought in the sphere of a universe of intelligibility. Two basic and intimately correlated matters stem from this process—one *practical*, and the other *theoretical*.

The *practical* question is immediately obvious.

To establish balanced dialogue it is necessary for each participant to have learned the language of the other. It is unsatisfactory, not to say unjust and therefore inadequate, to have an intercultural discussion by exclusively using the language of one of the cultures, as rich and open as it may be. It is methodologically wrong to have a Christian-Buddhist dialogue using exclusively the Christian language. As a result of the lack of a living intercultural awareness, we are often victims, even if most of the time unconsciously, of "unique thought," be it called "market," "democracy," "science," "civilization," "world order," "God," or "truth," symbols that the more they are inspired by good intentions, the more dangerous they are. Today we still hear, even though less and less, that Buddhism is not a religion since it does not recognize a God, or that theology is not philosophy because it recognizes another form of knowledge besides rational reason.

We should not confuse interculturality with cultural hermeneutics. The latter is an intermediary step necessary to open the gate for the comprehension of the other, even though most of the time this hermeneutics is monocultural. Therefore, we must criticize the current tendency, mostly present in the West, of using pragmatic argumentation for such dialogue. This for historical reasons affirms that Western cultures and languages (and, in particular, the English language) are better equipped, despite the fact that dialogues and arguments between Buddhism and Confucianism, as much as between Vishnuism and Shivaism, have been as numerous as modern Western dialogues.

It could be (but I am extremely doubtful) that, in the current circumstances, Western conceptual apparatus could make use of more adequate means than the rest of the world. It is enough to look at Western newspapers to realize the ferocious ethnocentrism of almost 90 percent of the overall news, not only in terms of information, but also in relation to studies and cultural articles. The Western man in the street lives under the impression that the so-called Third World is really underdeveloped: poverty, corruption, chaos, illness, lack of hygiene, natural disasters, and so on, all seasoned by a bit of Zen, yoga, and more or less superstitious popular spirituality. It is often said—for instance, in the United States, even by a president of the Chamber of Commerce in an official talk—that before American democracy, the world, even Europe, lived in obscurantism and superstition. There are a few

¹² See R. Panikkar, "Religione, Filosofia e Cultura," *Simplegadi* (Venezia, 2001): 45–75.

¹³ See R. Panikkar, "Words and Terms," in *Esistenza, mito ed ermeneutica*, ed. M. M. Olivetti, vol. II (Archivio di Filosofia) (Padova: CEDAM, 1980), 117–33.

¹⁴ See R. Panikkar, *L'esperienza filosofica dell'India* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2000), 33ff.

good specialized publications, but on the whole Western narcissism is undeniable, fueled, as it is, by the unilateral reaction of the self-flagellators who see the opposite everywhere. It could be that in modern interreligious and intercultural dialogue the initiative comes from the West or that the Christian language has achieved a deeper insight through the interreligious dialogue. It is the same as affirming that males (as much the whites of North America as the Brahmins in India) are generally better equipped for so-called modern life than women, blacks, or Dalits; surely if this is the case, it should encourage the correction of this inequality rather than perpetuating it in the name of a presumed efficiency. There is no doubt that English is the most widespread idiom used in dealing with problems arising in the context of the dominant Anglo-Saxon civilization. Western languages are in a better position than other languages to deal with the problems that they have created. The practical effects are obvious: women want to have equal power in the male-dominated system; Dalits long to be integrated into the dominant current of Westernized society; the poor aspire to become rich—that richness that the rich consider to be so. This may be inculturalization or also justice, but it is not interculturality.

Another example may help us clarify this point. In the South of India there is a movement that aims at teaching Christian theology in Tamil. After some years of experience, the teachers are beginning to show signs of weariness. The difficulty is not only that of translation, forgetting that the theological problem is not so much to translate English or Latin words into Tamil concepts, or to transpose the existing doctrines into a Tamil equivalent, as much as expressing the most important Christian intuitions in the Tamil language.¹⁵ When I speak of Christian intuition I am well aware that Christian theology does not have an original linguistic source; it does not have a sacred language of its own. "The letter kills" (2 Cor 3:6). Interculturality is not a matter of translation, but of communication and mutual fecundation.

There are safety measures, but most of the time we forget that they are only temporary solutions. I had the chance to take part in a Peruvian student's philosophical dissertation whose native language was Quechua. I don't know this language, but my interlocutor knew Spanish. Within himself, he had to translate the concepts to be expressed, trying to adapt himself to the Spanish categories, to which his own people has become used (obliged?) for five hundred years, with all the advantages and drawbacks involved. I tried to help him overcome the complex that made him believe that he belonged to an inferior culture and encouraged him to rethink what he had to say, shrugging off the weight of history and making the collaboration reciprocal, even though it was still expressed in Spanish. I might also add, as an anecdote, that many of the *Heideggerian* expressions that seem "Baroque" in German and forced in Spanish (and Italian) were "natural" in Quechua. Nevertheless, this is not sufficient: interculturality is not a one-way language.

It is superfluous to underscore how much patience, time, and discipline are needed to learn another language. The first step entails passing through the preliminary stage of literal translation, that is, the translation of foreign sentences into our own language. But subsequently, we should be able to understand the other language without translating it. Speaking another language is not translating it from ours; it is to speak, therefore to think, in the other language. During the Crusades of the thirteenth century, when that pioneering genius of interculturality, the troubadour, mystic, and philosopher Ramon Llull, tried to make a peaceful contribution to the encounter among religions, he not only learned Arabic, but

¹⁵ See R. Panikkar, "Indian Theology: A Theological Mutation," in *Theologizing in India*, ed. M. Amaladoss et al. (Bangalore: TPI, 1981), 23–42; and my brief article, "Indian Christian Theology," *Jeevadhara* 17, no. 161 (Kottayam/Kerala, September 1997): 319–21.

tried with all his strength to persuade Rome to establish chairs of Coptic, Arabic, and Greek in all the principal Christian universities.¹⁶ Monolingualism, colonialism, and intolerance are intimately connected.

Once more we may appreciate the importance of a concrete duologue as opposed to general and objective dialogues. I can learn the language of my neighbor, or the one of the culture I am interested in, but I cannot speak five thousand languages, even when grouped into linguistic families.

It is clear that an intercultural language does not exist, although in Europe during the eighteenth century, when people were full of enthusiasm about the discovery of a universal scientific methodology, of a *mathesis universalis*, the hope for a *lingua universalis* was cherished. There are transcultural expressions and words as well as some grammatical rules either in linguistic families or because of an osmosis between populations or due to the influence of the mass media. The influence of the English language on modern languages is obvious. Such transculturality refers not only to words and expressions but also to contents of meaning and forms of thinking that mutually influence each other. The word "religion" expresses for many a (religious) institution. If we know that *dharma* and *din* (*daena*) also deal with something that is part of the religious field, these three words could enrich each other. Hence *religio* will benefit from the connotations of *dharma* and *din* and vice versa. In this sense a mutual fecundation is established between the cultures that are in contact.

It is obvious that intercultural philosophy cannot favor any particular language, religion, or culture. It is not sufficient to know how to translate "God," "duty," or "life" into Sanskrit. I should also know how to render *brahman*, *dharma*, and *ayus* in Italian—then I would immediately realize the complexity inherent in every translation. In India the classical philosophy of language debates on where the meaning lies, whether in the word, in the phrase, or in the syllables, but it could also lie beyond—in the intonation, in the gesture, in the intention, and so on. The word is the fourfold reality formed by the speaker, the listener, the content, and the material sound.¹⁷ As already said, words are symbols, not merely signs.

The Starting Point

We have already said that the first problem concerning intercultural philosophy is language. We now come back to the main problem (discussed at the beginning), namely to the *starting point*. If, in fact, in the encounter between cultures there is a practical problem (languages), there is also a *theoretical* issue.

The first thing is that we need to communicate. But how can we understand each other? Using signs? And how do we understand their meaning? Simple sensorial knowledge is not enough, since to communicate a sensation, which is individual, I have to give up my individuality so that my interlocutor may understand what I mean to say. I can express only what I feel, but the expression of these sentiments already goes beyond my sensitivity. Together with sensorial communication we also need its hermeneutics. But Hermes is a god, not a thing, and to see God we need the third eye present in so many traditions, which does not exclude the eye of the intellect and the eye of the senses. There is a need to grasp the silence

¹⁶ See *Concilium Viennense* (1311–1312), *Decretum* 24, which decreed the creation of such chairs in the Roman Curia and at the universities of Paris, Oxford, Bologna, and Salamanca—even though the decree would never be totally implemented.

¹⁷ See R. Panikkar, "La paraula, creadora de realitat," in *Llenguatge i identitat*, ed. R. Panikkar (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1994), 11–61.

from where words come when they are authentic. Truly human words are more than signs and far more than concepts.

A Vedic insight, too often misunderstood, might be of help: the notion of *apauruseyatva*, the theory according to which the *Vedas* do not have an author (there is no person [*purusa*] behind them), therefore there is not a "revealer," divine or human, who dictated them.¹⁸ As far as we are concerned, we believe there is only a primordial Word speaking to us without the need of an intermediary—something that would force us into infinite regression. Be it a human being or a God speaking to us, how would we understand what is said if not through other signs with the function of words, through which they become intelligible?

This means that the word is not only an instrument of communication, but something belonging to actual human nature. The word is the mediator, as stated in the *Vedas* and the Gospel of St. John.

It is no wonder that classical Indian thought has reflected deeply on the word.

Intercultural communication needs such primordial words, which speak to us with immediacy, and interreligious dialogue must take place at a mystical level where understanding is easier. For too many centuries contemplation has been seen as a luxury or relegated to a privileged few. Mysticism is the passport to the overcoming of cultural barriers, and mysticism is not authentic if it is without love.

There is no doubt that the problem of language has acquired enormous importance in Western philosophical speculation over the last century, and not by chance it began with the discovery of Sanskrit in Europe. It is interesting to note that, with a few exceptions, the reflection has been confined to a post-Kantian epistemological framework (semantics, semiotics, structuralism, linguistic analysis . . .), however useful these may be to interculturality. Language, before having a sense, a meaning, a significance, a referent, and so on, reveals the speaker, the Man. Interculturality, before becoming an encounter between cultures, is an encounter between Men. Men speak to understand others and to better understand themselves, but also to be understood by others—something the West has often forgotten, creating tragic misunderstandings. But there is more. Man speaks because speaking, saying, is in his nature. He thinks because he speaks and speaks because he thinks. This relationship is *advaita*, a-dualistic: *Homo loquens*. The binomial "to think—to be" must be completed with trinomial "to think—to speak—to be."¹⁹ The consequences are important. Human communication is essentially linguistic, but human languages are as radically different as cultures.

We say that every language reveals a world, that every culture is like a galaxy with its own criteria of goodness, beauty, and truth. We have already said that truth, being in itself relational, is pluralistic—not plural. Pluralism stems from the awareness both of the incompatibility of the visions of the world and of the impossibility of judging them impartially, since no one is above his own culture, which gives us the tools for comprehension.²⁰ One of the symbols of this pluralism is the multiplicity of languages. They are not all saying the same thing. There is not a "thing in itself" (*Ding an sich*), a *noumenon* of which languages are the *phainomena*; nevertheless all are human languages, revealing the *humanum* in their manifestations. The motif is the same, but we may catch it only if we hear a particular melody as part of the same

¹⁸ See R. Panikkar *I Veda* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2001); for the *mimamsa*, see 16ff.

¹⁹ See R. Panikkar, "Thinking and Being," in *Du Vrai, du Beau, du Bien, Studi filosofici presentati al Prof. Evangelós A. Moutsopoulos* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), 39–42.

²⁰ See R. Panikkar, "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge," in *Religious Pluralism*, ed. L.S. Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 97–115.

music. To use the initial metaphor: frontiers are real, for they are boundaries of a *humus*, a human ground.

Pluralism does not lead to solipsism, in the sense of incommunicability, but to tolerance and to discovering the third dimension. Following the initial metaphor, just as it is not possible to cross the surface of the earth without violating it, we may still jump over it without touching the demarcation line, namely transcending it, so transcendence is the third dimension that allows us to communicate overcoming the boundaries of the diverse cultures.

The relativity—or radical relational nature—we are defending should not be confused with a relativism that destroys itself in the actual process of its own formulation. Absolute relativism is a mere contradiction. The radical relational nature we are defending is precisely a relationality related to the various cultural contexts in which every assertion takes on a meaning. We can formulate absolutely formal assertions, such as, “We must not do evil,” “What is enjoyable and what elevates our own sentiments is beauty,” and “Truth is what represents reality,” but not all cultures endow these words with the same significance.

I call this relativity “radical,” because it not only demonstrates that “everything” is correlated, but it affirms that the same “everything” is relational, that reality is not a chaos of individual monads. Neither is it a gigantic monad or a self-sufficient Absolute, but much more a net of (ontic) nuclei with (ontological) visibility, even if it is of (metaphysical) consistence. This relativity saves us from a cultural solipsism and avoids falling into a monistic homogenization that destroys all diversity.

The meaning of this complex paragraph should be clear: reality (Being, that which in some form causes beings *to be*) is not only *distinctive* and objective, it is also subjectively in us; we are part of it and we are aware of it precisely in our relationships with what we call the “whole,” which is nothing more than the notion that we acquire starting from our own relationships.

We may presuppose a common human nature provided we do not substantivize it and we do not forget that this nature is only a concept in transcendental relation to its own respective concrete manifestations.

What we have said so far validates Aristotle's saying, “*Et philosophi est de omnibus posse speculari*” (*Metaphysics* IV.2 [1004 34]),²¹ provided that this “philosopher's ability of theorizing about anything” is not understood as rational knowledge able to understand everything, but rather as that quality of the human microcosm of being conscious of its own life (*psyche*); using Stagira's expression, it is a reflection of the all: “*anima quodammodo omnia*” (*Of the soul* III.8 [431b 21]).²² Not only does human nature form a single net, but reality as a whole constitutes a relational whole of relatively interdependent elements. These which are described with diverse expressions, from the *sarvam sarvatmakam* (all is in relation to all) of the Trika school of Kashmiri Shaivism to the Patristic *perichoresis* (dynamic interpretation of reality), to the Buddhist *pratityasamutpada* (the interdependence of everything) or to the *quodlibet in quolibet* (everything in everything) of Cusano (Cusa), and so on.

Without going further in our analysis, we repeat that our starting point is simply the existential encounter in an authentic attempt to establish dialogue with the whole of reality, especially with men. Dialogue will reveal by itself what it needs, long before we postulate the “conditions of possibility.” The point of departure is not provided by a mind *a priori*, nor cobbled together by willpower or by usefulness (however much it masquerades as spiritual). We should not forget how important the pureness of heart is in most of the traditions—from

²¹ “It is proper for philosopher to reflect (to theorize) upon everything.”

²² “Soul is to certain extent all things.”

naiskarmya karma (action without attraction) of the *Gita* to evangelical innocence, to the spontaneity of love of the Sufis, to the instinctiveness of Tao, to the elimination of the desire in Buddhism, to the primary importance of the pure life in animism, and so on.²³

The real starting point for intercultural dialogue in our actual situation consists in bilateral dialogue (duologue) between translators, and this is what we refer to when recommending that interlocutors be prepared for dialogue. But to know one's own tradition is still not enough: we must know, even if imperfectly, the culture of the other. Moreover, it is not possible to understand a text without knowing its context, and it is not possible to know a culture, if we do not love it.

It is not enough that my Quechua interlocutor speaks Spanish and that I understand his language; I, or anyone else, also need to know Quechua so that both of us can verify and compare our own respective translations. Obviously we refer to the knowledge of the spirit of a language and not merely to its vocabulary.

Actually, this is precisely what has taken place in history when dialogues were fertile; when, on the contrary, this was not the case, there have been moments of misunderstanding that have reached enormous and historical proportions. It is usually said that the root of the problem in the dialogue between Abrahamic religions and certain types of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism is that the Semitic God is personal. On the other hand Vedanta Divinity is impersonal. Sankaracarya's reasons for claiming that "God," as the ultimate cause, cannot be personal (this would be anthropomorphism) are the same as those used by Thomas Aquinas to affirm that God is personal, since he has intelligence and volition. Interculturality asks what could be meant by the personality and impersonality of God in different cultures; it asks even if the binomial, living/nonliving could not be misleading.

Once more we encounter the inevitable political aspect of every human activity. Dialogues were fruitful when they were peaceful, even though sometimes they only took place after conquests and abuse. The European panorama could have been very different if the first Christian generations had had a deeper knowledge of the fact that *hypostasis*, *hypokeimenon*, *ousia*, and *prosopon* do not have the same significance as *substantia*, *subsistentia*, *essentia*, and *persona*.²⁴ Christianity would not have been split between West and East. In 1439, when an attempt was made to correct the misunderstandings inherent to a correlated problem, it was too late (notwithstanding the papal bull *Laetentur Caeli*, Denzinger 1300–1302) to have a decisive influence on the life of the two cultures. The point was not to declare that the meaning of those words was the same, but rather to accept two conceptions of reality and two different approaches for a more appropriate formulation (Trinitarian in this case) within the respective visions of the world.

To sum up: The point of departure is to establish the path to be followed together. Intercultural method cannot be proposed *a priori*. It is not possible to reduce intercultural philosophy to abstract speculation.²⁵

²³ See R. Panikkar, in *Mito, fede ed ermeneutica. Il triplice velo della realtà* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2000), especially the chapter "Morality and Myth" (51–76, and above all "Re-Mythising Morality" [70–76], where there is criticism of "interested action" (even with good intentions). In our case, dialogue is carried out for its own sake and not for an extrinsic aim.

²⁴ Trinity as "one substance in the three persons" (Tertullian) was seen by the Greeks as a rigid monotheism and pure modalism (the reduction of the Trinity to simply *modus*), which destroyed the Trinity, whereas God as three substances (*hypostasis*) and one person (*prosopon*) was seen by the Latins as tritheism and negation of the Trinity.

²⁵ See, as a concrete example, R. Forner-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

There is much to be learned from the institutional religions, from mysticism and even from contemporary science and Marxism. "Intercultural philosophy" is far more than a simple intracultural dialogue, even though the latter is a step forward compared to the disputes between different philosophical conceptions. We repeat that intercultural philosophy is above all an *attitude* always sustained by the ruling *mythos*.

I have called this attitude a *learning philosophy*, i.e., a philosophy that, like any authentic philosophy,²⁶ starting from its own perspective, is ready to learn from others.

The novelty and difficulty of intercultural philosophy stems from the fact that there is no metacultural platform from where it is possible to reach an interpretation of cultures, since every interpretation is *ours*. It is true that this attempt to interpret another culture is an intermediary step opening us to external influences and offering us a certain knowledge of the other, but "the other" does not recognize itself as "other": we are "the other" for the different culture. The aporia is this: How do we preserve our rationality while transcending it? How do we understand the other if we are not the other?

Before proceeding in our exposition, we should give an example of how important language is and especially how it relates to its user's vision of the world. I am talking about the importance of the interconnection between *logos* and *mythos*. Because of the modern Western *mythos* of individualism, many European languages make no distinction between the two Latin words *alius-a-ud* and *alter-a-um* (*ali-teru*), both of them translated as "other." If God is "das ganz Andere" (totally the Other), we have an unsurpassable dualism. If God is an *Alter* and not an *Alius*, it implies that God is the other (part, side, aspect, being, creator . . .) of us. If the "other" human being is a stranger or foreigner, we have to resign ourselves to what we said regarding the impossibility of knowing the "other" as "other" (*aliud*). If the other human being is my fellow, another one (*alter*), then I am able to know him as the other part of myself and as a complement to my self-knowledge. It has been said that one should "love your neighbor as yourself"—as your own I, and not as *another* I.

Interculturality aims at discovering the *alter* (not the *alius*) in our dialogue. An *other* doctrine (different from ours) may be *alia* or *altera* according to the presence or absence of love in our encounter. We may understand the other if we discover that we are the *alter*—our *alter* (*altera pars*)—of the other. This is the function of love as a source of knowledge, as we will see later.

Three examples, which I have witnessed, will perhaps clarify what I want to say.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), a huge divergence between European and Spanish bishops took place. While the former sympathized with the "Republicans," the Spanish bishops, at least at the beginning, took a stand with the military insurrection, even defining the war as a "crusade." The Spanish bishops hardly knew the European ones; therefore they had no opportunity of communicating. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) tried to break the isolation of the bishops by establishing territorial synods.

The same Council was the first to speak in a positive way about other religions, precisely because of the presence of a minority of bishops who had befriended believers of other religions. They were opposed by all those who had never had any rapport with believers of other religions, basing their position only on what they had read: they lacked a personal relationship.

A third example comes from an *ashram* in South India. Realizing that I was devastated after hearing about Kennedy's death, the first reaction that people living in the ashram had was to ask if I had known him personally. . . . There are always a lot of deaths and assassination

²⁶ Cf. R. Panikkar, "Aporias in the Comparative Philosophy of Religions," in *Man and World* 13, no. 3–4 (The Hague–Boston–London, 1980): 357–83.

attempts! Maybe in Western countries there is the same reaction when they hear about the horrifying news from Timor, Indonesia, Africa . . . : these are distant and unknown peoples. Therefore, news of them does not touch us much.

Briefly: if I have never spoken to a Khmer Rouge, or to Vietnamese or to a "fundamentalist," I can neither know nor love him. I cannot really conceive of my "fellow man" if he is not close, known, someone to whom I have spoken. Love is not an ideology. Human beings are not only ideas. Dialogue—I mean dialogical dialogue where heart is as much present as mind—is indispensable. As we have already underlined, if I do not know the other I will not be able to know my self either—the *alter* of me.

Communion in the *Mythos*

At this stage we hope the reader will have understood what we meant to say, for we share a more or less common universe of discourse, a horizon of intelligibility that allows us to understand what we are saying and to agree or disagree with it. We have realized that we are discussing the same thing; the same *it*—an *it* that is not precisely a "thing in itself," but an *it* that we discover in itself, because we place it on a common horizon, and that allows us not to ask "why?" for the umpteenth time: it is what I call *mythos*. We accept it as obvious, evident, natural, true, and convincing; we don't feel the need to look for something else. We believe in it so much that we never "think" of believing in it: it is a "taken for granted," "*à l'évidence*," "*cela va de soi*," "*selbstverständlich*" . . .

What we have just said leads on to three observations:

1. *The communion in mythos*, as defined above, makes intercultural communication possible, since it allows us to grasp the meaning of what the other says, even when we don't share the same conceptual world. The vehicle of the *mythos* is not the concept, but the symbol, and symbolic consciousness is what opens us to *mythos*.

There is an important difference between consciousness and knowledge, or rather I should talk of the importance of making a difference between consciousness and knowledge, since in this field there are an immense variety of interpretations. By consciousness I mean the most generic human capacity of being conscious, realizing something, becoming aware, perceiving, discerning the state of certain things, "leaving" such a state as it is, intact. I "witness" something without penetrating or assimilating it and I leave it as it is. Scholars called such consciousness "apperception." It is not conceptual knowledge; it precedes any judgment. The admonishment, "Do not judge" (Mt 7:1), in the Gospels belongs to this "new innocence" of becoming aware without going beyond. We see, but we do not judge. "Things are pondered in the heart" (Lk 2:9), and even though we do not understand them, that does not exclude discernment at a later stage. Instead of this, knowledge leads us to what our intellect strives for, that is, intelligibility, the whole transparency of the known that tends to identify itself with us. It is significant that the *inter-legere* (to gather up, to choose between) of the *intellectus* (intelligence) has become *intus-legere* (to reunite, to unite within).

Taking into account all these ambiguities we may say that consciousness is mythical whereas knowledge is logical. I would like to be able to say: consciousness sees, knowledge watches, it is alert. We see with the eye and watch with the mind. Contemplation belongs to *mythos*, reflection to *logos*; faith moves in the sphere of *mythos*, reason in the field of *logos*; but these two dimensions are inseparable, even though we can and must distinguish them. I cannot say without contradiction, "I understand that I don't understand my interlocutor," when he is saying things that have no meaning for me. However, I can certainly affirm that I am aware of not perceiving, of being aware that his vision of reality follows paths that are

different from mine. Notwithstanding the inherent ambiguity of certain words belonging to almost all cultures, we can notice some differences between intellect, reason, and intuition; between *buddhi*, *manas*, and *cit*; or *nous*, *logistikon*, and *pneuma*; or even between *sophia*, *gnosis*, and *episteme*, and so on.

It is well known that each of these words has been used differently by different philosophies, and we cannot claim any monopoly over them. As already said, words are symbols, unlike technical terms that are directly verifiable (or falsifiable) in a univocal conceptual system, as, for instance, in modern science. If such ambiguity occurs within subcultures, it is not surprising that in going beyond the boundaries of specific cultures we should pay careful attention to the language.

All this is directly related to the problem of intercultural communication. It is still the heritage of the colonial spirit to believe that each word of whatever language may be translated into another language. Language is not only *logos*; it is also *mythos*, and if the *logoi* may be to a certain extent translated, the *mythoi* are far more difficult to transplant because *mythos* does not have an objective existence in an ideal world. A *mythos* in which we do not believe is not a *mythos*, but a mythology (a tale of the myths of others in which we do not believe). Human comprehension in the sense of harmony and concord requires communion in the *mythos*, and it cannot be solved with the "Illuminist" dream of the *lingua universalis*, where each and every word has a precise meaning. *Dharma* in Buddhism is not the equivalent of *dharma* in Hinduism; the word *âtman*, which can mean body, I, self, and God (*brahman*), does not have one single equivalent in Western languages. The Japanese *basho* does not correspond to our meaning of place or locality, *topos*; finally the German *Geist* is not synonymous with the English *mind*, nor with French *esprit*. To be able to find "homeomorphic equivalents," we have to know the respective contexts, which are in some way shared in the myths of the different cultures. Furthermore, dialogical dialogue that opens us to communion in the *mythos* also discloses a third "element" for complete hermeneutics. Together with text and context there is a pretext (to talk or write), that literally is pre-text, something before the text that allows the author to speak or write with a certain intention. The purpose inherent to the text is not identical to the author's pretext; the first aims at the truthfulness (of spoken or written words), whereas the latter aims at the sincerity of the writer (or speaker). The problems are complex. In brief, the personal dimension is inseparable from any human action.

To sum up: to "understand" another culture it is not sufficient to understand its concepts; we need to "understand" its symbols. Or, in other words, it is not sufficient to penetrate into the *logos* (of the other culture), but we must also participate in the *mythos*. I have some friends among the so-called fundamentalists (Christians, Muslims, Hindûs, scientists . . .): our ideas differ, but we have succeeded in sharing a kind of mythic universe (Vedic with the Hindûs, biblical with the Christians . . .) that makes dialogue possible—and also arguments. Myth is polysemic, admitting a plurality of interpretations. We talk to each other with sincerity and friendship and often we are able to find a common *mythos* as a starting point. Their conclusions may differ from mine, but we are able to identify where divergences begin and the reasons behind them. I may admit that "God" does not exist, since I also do not believe in that "God" in whom scientists do not believe. To the Islamic assertion that the Qur'an is the final revelation of God, I may answer that I am able to see the reasons for such a firm belief and that to a certain extent I can also agree, without the theistic presuppositions that seem anthropomorphic to me. I would have no difficulty (since I believe it) in recognizing that what I call Mystery could be manifested also to my friend in a different form. We don't say the same "thing," we don't use the same language. However, we participate in the same *mythos* of our self-insufficiency and the contingency of the necessity of being open to the Absolute.

which he calls Allah, who manifests himself in history, which for him is decisive and that I, even without negating it, don't make absolute. . . . This does not solve every divergence, but it allows the identification of a common point from which divergences start. I don't exclude that some of them could nurture the slender "hope" that perhaps one day they will convince me; my answer to them is even though I am not "fanatical" about my ideas, I don't think it will happen; on the contrary I think that they may abandon what to me seems like fanaticism. Sincerity and a certain degree of humor, not free from irony, allow us to continue with the dialogue, which, if really sincere, cannot exclude the possibility of "conversion."

In other words, communion in the *mythos* is a communion in our humanity, beyond the limits of the *humanum*.

2. *Communion in mythos* is not the same as a consensus in *logos*. Myth is fluid. It is like the horizon that moves as we come closer or like the Tao. Myth is unreachable, ungraspable. It can only be clothed by a narration, which will be a *mythos-legein*—there is a speaker—when we believe in it, or a "mythology" when we tell the "tale" of others. If its own vehicle is the symbol, its own source (and its power) is faith. Myth must be believed in; otherwise it is not a myth. The myth that we believe in is not an object of rational knowledge, but rather it is what allows us to believe in such a knowledge. When the torch of reason lights up the obscurity of myth, myth disappears, but it is darkness that allows light to shine. Obscurity cannot be invested with light without disappearing. Darkness cannot welcome light (Jn 1:4). The *Brhadaranyaka-upanishad* IV.2.2²⁷ states that "God loves darkness," and even a Psalm sings (18/17:11), that God "posuit tenebras latibulum suum," "He made darkness his covering around him." Another Upanishad states that divine power is hidden among its attributes (*guna*) (*Svetasvatara-upanishad* I.3). "It is the glory of God to conceal his word" (Prov 25:2).²⁸ A sura of the Qur'an (LXIV.18–[19]) affirms, "Knower [Allah] of what is hidden and what is open."

Culture is similar to the omni-comprehensive myth accepted as valid in a particular time and space. In maintaining, for instance, that history is the myth of the modern West, we mean to say that the historical "fact" is considered to be a real fact, which is not obvious at all in other cultures. Yet whoever lives within the myth of history cannot understand how it is possible to negate the authentic reality of a historical fact. Then dialogue will lead to discussion about whether there are different degrees of reality, or what the meaning of being real is.

Interculturality is the ground where myths meet and interweave. There are transcultural myths in concrete times and limited spaces. But even myths have their own boundaries and their intercultural frontiers.

Buddhist "apologues," Indian and Greek "myths," African "tales," Gospel parables, the "reason" of Illuminism, the "archetypes" of the human psyche, and the "novels" of literature have a stamped passport with many cultural visas and they are essentially polysemous, but they cannot claim a universal validity, belonging to all spaces and times. Cannibalism, human sacrifice, slavery, discrimination against women are some of the mythical beliefs that have lost or are losing their validity in our time and space—or they are changing their exterior aspect.

Interculturality offers us a middle way between the absolutism of the defense of universal values such as universal ethics, the common market, planetary democracy, or some global human rights and the same absolute denial of such values, because they are not considered to be universal. Intercultural behavior is trying to find, within our current world and in the

²⁷ "They love the hidden (*paroksa*) and despise the manifested (*pratyaksa*)."

²⁸ The Vulgate says bluntly, "Gloria Dei est celare Verbum." Martin Buber translates the Hebrew text, "eine Sache verbergen."

respective different cultures, the "homeomorphic equivalents" of such values, even though they are, *de facto*, born in the bosom of a single culture; therefore it is contributing to an intercultural fecundation. It will try, for instance, to integrate the rights of the individual with "the rights of man," meaning a person, extending them to all creatures and balancing them with the duties and thereby exposing even the notion of "duty" to intercultural criticism.²⁹

To sum up: the understanding of the other culture is never complete, since, even if its own "reasons" (*logoi*) may convince us, its own fundamental myths may be incompatible with ours; furthermore, since myths do not follow logical reasoning, nor do they obey volition. Changing cultures is very problematic. This is the reason why many religions do not believe that conversion is possible—since it is more than simply changing ideas. Hence, we may maintain that interculturality reveals our limitations, teaching us tolerance and giving us insights into the contingency of the human condition.

Another personal example is worth mentioning here. A young researcher came to a southern Indian university to talk to the staff of the Faculty of Philosophy about what was still known as "continental philosophy," to distinguish it from Anglo-Saxon philosophy. In the years immediately following Indian independence the environment was deeply Hindū. The theme of the talk was the important nihilist and atheist European authors: Nietzsche, Sartre, N. Hartmann, and others. Listening to his presentation I thought that the scholar, while defending the atheism of those philosophers, was propagating Christian ideas in an alien environment, so much so that I had the impression he was an intelligent missionary. Later I found out that he not only was not Christian, but that he was a Hebrew atheist, brought up in an environment far from both Christianity and Judaism, and that he felt indifference, if not aversion, to whatever could be called "religious." His own European culture, his own myth, as well as the myth of "his" philosophers were, after all, Judeo-Christian, despite his explicit rejection of this tradition. Many Westerners "converted" to Hinduism or Buddhism still remain in the Christian *mythos*. We may quite easily change our own ideas, but *mythos* is far deeper. A few decades ago Christian missionaries in Africa and Asia would say that the first generation of the "converted," despite their acceptance of the Christian doctrine, remained "pagan" in their souls, that is, unwittingly linked to their ancestral religion. Times are changing! In a cartoon that escaped from Mao Tze-tung's censors, a communist explained to a comrade, "... as Confucius used to say, obviously mistakenly ...": the myth of reference was still the ancient one.

3. *The communion in mythos* creates solidarity but, at the same time, if not counterbalanced by *logos*, might lead to fanaticism. We believe so naturally in our myths that we need the other to discover our myth. This is where the importance of dialogical dialogue lies—where the other is an *alter* not an *alius*, a neighbor, not a stranger, revealing our own *mythos*, the *altera pars* of ourselves. Without this openness to the other, collective myths may become extremely dangerous, turning into racism and nationalism (Arian, Hebrew, Japanese, white, black, and other); the strength of these justifications unfortunately cannot be denied.

As we have already said, *mythos* has longer life and deeper and more slender roots than *logos*. A provocative example is the persistence of *mythos* striving to destroy evil by eliminating the alleged culprit. The danger does not lie in the will of a few individuals, but in the popular consensus that certain propaganda might create. Nazism wanted to eliminate gypsies and above all Jews, and today antiterrorism actually is trying to defeat terrorism by eliminating any suspected terrorist. The *myth* endures.

²⁹ See R. Panikkar, "La notion des droits de l'homme est-elle un concept occidental?" *Diogenes* 120 (Paris, 1982): 87–115.

Our own respective myths are hidden in the different ways we approach reality and in the ways in which we convince ourselves that we have discovered it. Myths may be divided according to the themes they cover, which appear convincing when associated with a "particular way of thinking" (*Denkweisen*), or perhaps simply with the categories in which we mythically believe.

What we have just said implies an important corollary: interculturality cannot follow the comparative method of the simple analogies, since to establish a confrontation we must use our own categories. If we believe angels and demons to be real, comparing them to energy vibrations will not persuade people who believe in angelical worlds. If we believe "the other life" to be as real as this one, if we believe evolution is virtually the only convincing hypothesis, while others believe in the *creatio continua* (or *ksaniksa vada*), because the respective positions "square" with the different ways of thinking, it is obvious that dialogue cannot merely be dialectical or conceptual. It must go "beyond" the mental without abandoning it and reach the level of the myths in which different opinions are plausible. There is no need to directly clarify the different visions of the world implied in the myths, so that they immediately become the subject of discussion and dialogue, since the same myths make the language for dialogue possible. We discuss the themes of the myths, not the myths themselves. For intercultural communication to prosper we must hope for and prepare a convergence of myths. We are neither the directors nor the masters of myths. Interculturality testifies to the rhythm with which human life unfolds. One of the more insidious effects of any type of advertising derives from the fact that by using freedom of expression it undermines the mythical base of its ideas, inducing people to change their opinions without being aware of the fact that they are doing so.

This is the impasse we mentioned above. *Logos* is rigid, *mythos* is flexible. To a certain extent we have control over our *logos*, but we cannot directly manipulate *mythos*. *Mythos* eludes both our reason and our will. The relationship between them is, from the perspective of *logos*, dialectical: the light of *logos* dispels the darkness of *mythos*. The same relationship is mythical, if observed from the perspective of *mythos*. The darkness of *mythos* makes the light of *logos* possible. Their interconnection is a-dualistic; they belong together, but ought not to be confused. When, through the power of *logos*, we become aware of our own *mythos*, the latter recedes, turning into a conscious principle, a pragmatic postulate, a foundation where no foundation can be found (*Abgrund*). There is a constant dynamism between *logos* and *mythos* in both directions, and this may lead to consequences feared by many.³⁰ Our openness to interculturality obliges us to renounce the ideal of a completely intelligible reality. Intercultural attitude invites us to overcome the so-called *reductio ad unum* required by reason to reach intelligibility. We must not minimize the importance of modern logic, which is a monument to human perspicacity, representing a huge step forward in relation to classical logic (non-Euclidean geometry, polyvalent logic, transfinite series, etc.), but in any case we are dealing with the progress of mathematics, except in the case, maybe, of the subtlety of the Buddhist and Hindu logic. Interculturality should not despise logic, but it cannot be reduced to a logical problem.

At this stage not only rationalism, but both idealism and a certain monotheism come into the picture. None of these three visions of the world can in fact contain or do justice to the variety of the cultures that do not presuppose a totally intelligible reality. The modern Western world has found an outlet, or better an alibi, in that which seems to justify its supe-

³⁰ See R. Panikkar, "Mythos und Logos. Mythologische und rationale Weltansichten," in *Geist und Natur*, ed. H. P. Durr, W. Ch. Zimmerli (Bern: Scherz, 1989), 206–20.

riority. I am referring to the fact of interpreting cultures within an evolutionist scheme, so that they are classified according to the degree in which they have succeeded in accepting "our" hypothesis: we do not actually condemn them, but we classify them as "primitive," "developing," and so on. The simple fact that the political world has so easily and uncritically accepted these expressions shows the power of the modern evolutionist myth.

To sum up: interculturality challenges the prevalent myths of the present status quo, forcing us to reevaluate our deepest beliefs. We risk drowning in deadly relativism or reaching some liberating relativity, unless we keep the third eye open to mystical reality, which is able to overcome every absolutism. In other words, interculturality invites us to discover the universal in the deepening of the concrete.

Is Science a Transcultural Language?

There is no doubt that the modern world, both in the East and West, is under the massive influence of techno-science, which has not only changed human history but also the geography of the planet. Techno-science is the daughter of a single culture. Thus interculturality is reduced to a sterile exercise or an unreal dream if it does not face up to this situation. Is it perhaps Utopia? Or is Utopia the building of the Tower of Babel that has never been completed, but that we still hope to complete with the "materials" of modern science? Will Man succeed this time? What is Utopia: a never-experienced interculturality or the Tower of Babel, which has kept on collapsing for about six thousand years?³¹ The Tower of Babel represents the ideal of a universal civilization that, like a huge ziggurat, touches the sky so as to unite all peoples under the umbrella of scientific rationality, which is not the firmament of infinite space. Interculturality, affirming the pluralistic nature of humanity, expresses the alternative to this human dream. The history of the last six millennia does not seem to have succeeded, with or without the Tower of Babel, in bringing about harmony and peace. The problem can be solved with a shift from a culture of war to a culture of peace founded on the acceptance of diversity without being perceived as a threat to the unity of Man. This is the big dilemma as well as the huge challenge that we will examine.

This problem has metaphysical roots, and ignoring them leads us to temporary solutions. It is the Greek cosmological problem of the one and the many (*hen kai polla*), corresponding to the biblical anthropological problem of the unity of nature and the plurality of languages. We have already said that multilingualism belongs to the essence of interculturality. As the material world has many colors, so the human world has a plurality of languages.

Myths resist the passing of time more than ideas. We are referring here to the myth of humanity reunited under a big cultural tower, so big as to allow the development of subcultures on different levels of the gigantic ziggurat. This myth, which seems to be universal (unity and harmony of the real), is converted into a misleading and counterproductive ideology when *mythos*, always inseparable from the spirit (*pneuma*), is reduced exclusively to *logos*: It is the difference between the Pentecost (many languages but one spirit) and Babel (one language but without spirit)—or also between Trinity and monotheism. This is the background of the modern belief in the universality of science and the vision of the cosmos that such a vision implies—a myth in which I also believed during my scientific training and over the many years spent in the predominant civilization, until I was liberated by intercultural experience.

The myth of globalization, in this case of the universality of science, is not unique. We may consider certain religious discourses that speak of religion as a metaculture or about

³¹ See R. Panikkar, *La Torre di Babele* (San Domenico di Fiesole, Edizioni Cultura della Pace, 1990).

the Western conviction (still widespread) regarding the universality of its own culture and consequently of its own universalism. The most striking proof of this conviction is found in modern science, which claims to be universal and neutral and consequently gives no value to interculturality. We may think of the "Westernization of the earth" and how all countries want to imitate science and technology—with the exception of those who want to destroy them (so-called terrorists) and those who, more or less unwittingly, oppose them through passive resistance (so-called primitives or underdeveloped peoples).

It is said that "our" cosmology, even though incomplete, reveals the real world: cultural values may be idiosyncratic and particular, whereas scientific facts are universal to whoever is able to understand and accept them. Techno-science is, *de facto*, present all over the planet, which induces many to profess that in it we can find a complete hope for humanity. An example is the blasphemous, if it were not ridiculous, statement that with the discovery of the genome we have found God's language (attributed to the former US president Bill Clinton). This thesis is specious for three reasons.

First, it forgets that to allow the scientific point of view to be so amply transcultural, postulates and paradigms of the physico-mathematical premises must have preventively been introduced, as in the case of the Trojan horse. Therefore, those basic symbols of human cultures are "scientifically" reinterpreted; time, for instance, is no longer a constitutive dimension of Being, but a measurable quantity in the relation between space and velocity. Light is no longer a metaphor for the Divine, but a wavelike oscillation. Intelligence is no longer a spiritual self-consciousness, but something that can be artificially "created," and space is no longer that ether (*aither*, *akasa*) shining and revealing the Void and Absence, but the distance between material points. Man is no longer an emanation of the mystery of reality, but an evolved monkey. Science is no longer *scientia*, *gnosis*, *jnana*, the act by which Man identifies himself with what he knows, but the control and prediction of the behavior of observable things and so on. Once the language has been transformed, all the rest follows as a consequence. We have already touched on the political problem of language: "masters" dictate the meaning of the words. When the Christian missionaries went to Korea, first they "had to" introduce the sense of "sin" so as to introduce the need for "redemption."

However, if the argument were limited to the defense of the value of modern science in its own epistemological field, it would not have enough strength, and would merely represent a very positive cultural contribution, since modern "logic" is doubtlessly "progress" in the mathematical field and modern science is an inspired creation of the spirit of modernity. This is obvious. We are not contesting the brilliance of modern science, but its claim to universality and neutrality.

I have labeled this thesis as "specious" by playing with the original meaning of the word, now obsolete, of right, beauty, therefore attractive, and for this reason dangerous or deceptive, if we fall into the trap of separating the parts from the whole. This is not the trap of specialization, but of the identification of the parts with the whole. The danger lies not so much in this rough confusion as in the extrapolating from the whole methods that are appropriate only for the parts. For instance, the physical-mathematical aspect of the matter is considered applicable to all matter as such and therefore to reality as a whole. It is the trap of studying an entity "in itself" (objectivity) separated from the "I myself" (subjectivity) and finally from "the Same" (immanent transcendence). While admitting that modern science is a wonderful achievement of the human mind, it would be cultural totalitarianism to identify it with culture by considering it as the only and right form of thought for Man. I repeat that it is not pure science making this statement, but it is the techno-scientific civilization we are

living in that is incapable of offering another model for a conception of the world and so we apply to the whole what characterizes only a part.

Second, this thesis neglects both human and sociological factors, that these ways of approaching reality and calculating it, as in modern science, supersede other ways of "thinking" things and approaching reality—for example, with symbolic thought. Ironically, part of the logic that I have just praised is called "symbolic logic." Hence, we are so attached to our thought patterns that often we do not understand another culture even though we think we know the language of the other.

An almost trivial example may help to clarify what I mean. It has often been noted that one of the difficulties in understanding between Western tourists and people belonging to other cultures has been the consideration that when a non-Westerner says "tomorrow," "yes," "a lot," "I understand," "I agree," and so on, the Westerners understand these words in a strictly objective and generally quantitative sense. For autochthonous peoples they express a frame of mind, or better a motion of the heart, generously left to Westerners' interpretation so as not to bind them to strict categories. Never limit freedom with a fixed answer! How many times have Western tourists criticized Indians by calling them liars and stating that they were not trustworthy, making reference, as a typical example, to the *rickshaw-walla* who, after stating they knew the way, keep on stopping to ask information since they actually do not know it. Their aim is not to increase the price of the run, but a much simpler reason: how can a poor Indian play a nasty trick on the rich tourist saying that he does not know what he is supposed to know. To tell the truth for the common Indian is to say what he thinks the other expects him to say and so everyone is happy! But tourists, belonging to a different culture, don't know and don't like the game. Truth is a relationship. This example is more than a simple anecdote. Most of the Western or Westernized anthropological and philosophical studies project causal and "logical" thought onto the manifestations of other cultures that do not correspond to the self-comprehension of the locals. Today we may smile at Lévy-Bruhl, but we have not gone much "beyond" Lévi-Strauss (to cite just two eminent scholars), who through empirical studies tried to salvage the space between rational and prelogical, sensitive and intelligible.

Interculturality goes a step further, since it establishes dialogue on an equal level and in both directions. Briefly, the model of scientific thought is only a very particular paradigm and, despite being excellent in its own field, if extrapolated, causes the destruction of the symbolic universe of the other cultures. Most of the massacres during the conquest of America are due more to this symbolic destructuring of the universe in which those peoples were living than to intentional genocide. We may answer that this is the price to pay if "they want" to gain the advantages of a "superior culture," but then we should not conceal this price, presenting "progress" as a gift. It has been said that this is the evolution of the world and that nobody can stop it. We might start to suspect that this Western and Westernized mentality is more fatalistic than so-called Eastern fatalism. This is not just a witty remark. Ancient fatalism was rooted in destiny as established by the Gods, to whom we could still pray to invoke a change. Scientific "fate" is fixed and immutable; we can play with probability or with the relations of indeterminacy (Heisenberg), but the scientific laws of nature are beyond Man, contradicting what from Genesis (1:26–31) to the Upanisads (*Mundaka-upanisad* III.7; *Maitri-upanisad* VI.17; etc.) most of the cultures say, and the Qur'an (XVI.12 [13]) defines in this way: "He has made subject to you the Night and the Day; the Sun and Moon; and the Stars are in subjection by His command," even though this should not be scientifically interpreted. It is obvious that from the point of view of dominant anthropology and cosmology, these phrases seem like pure superstition.

Briefly, the power of the scientific vision of the world is obvious, but it is excessively reductionist, monocultural, and devoid of imagination, as if *Homo technologicus* were synonymous with *Homo sapiens*.

Third, this thesis is specious because scientific culture presupposes that mathematical language is a faithful mirror of reality. This belief is doubtless strong, but nevertheless it is too simplistic.

Apart from other possible criticisms, the theory of science as a mirror of reality is based on a specious method: it shuts out whatever cannot be reflected by the mirror—for instance, whatever is unique, not quantifiable, and not verifiable. It is well-known that single events, generally the most important and decisive in human life and history, cannot be the object of scientific study.

It is a well-known claim that nature is written in mathematical terms, but this is open to a threefold observation:

1. Writing is not reality just as a geographical map is not the territory. It may be said that science has never claimed to define reality, but it has merely described its behavior; nevertheless, the two aspects as claimed by scientific cosmology ("big bang," "black holes," "entropy," "light-years," etc.) cannot be separated, since they deal with the behavior of the real world. The old metaphysical saying, according to which action follows being (*operari sequitur esse*), must be completed with the physical version according to which being follows action (*esse sequitur operari*).³² We cannot separate the behavior of nature from nature itself. If science tells us how things behave, such behavior reveals, at least partly, something about the thing in itself. Writing may not describe the whole of reality, but it describes the behavior of reality—and not of illusory entities. The behavior of things reveals some aspects of the things themselves. Furthermore, even though pure science is more discreet, techno-science, applied directly to the real world, through its achievements makes us believe that the world is really like this.

In any case, to mistake the writing about reality with reality itself would be a reduction that only scientific "fundamentalism" could defend.

2. Even if nature were written in mathematical characters, one must know how to read and thus interpret it. Modern science believes it has an interpretative key, a key molded with mathematical postulates. Intercultural challenge consists in demonstrating that there are other interpretative keys, that is, that the book of Nature is open to many interpretations and that science is just one of them.

3. Even if nature were *written* in mathematical language and writing were faithful to reality, it must be added that writing does not *speak* reality, but only an aspect of it.

I am not defending illiteracy, but the positive values of the oral cultures and especially the value of the oral aspect in human relationships. This is another difficult task for interculturality: to defend written culture, but not to the detriment of the oral one. We cannot deny that the contempt or the simple ignorance of the value of the oral cultures has led to more than one genocide, not only linguistic (almost five thousand languages have disappeared in the twentieth century), but also human (entire tribes were butchered in Asia and Oceania in the same century). Ironically, perhaps contemporary culture will contribute to a reevaluation of oral culture. The hermeneutics of the image seem again to require an oral explanation: too many pages are needed to explain a smile or gesture.

We are now at a crossroads of historical dimensions, and it is meaningless to dissimulate its importance with hypocrisy or false compassion. This is the real challenge of globalization.

³² See R. Panikkar, *Ontonomía de la ciencia* (Madrid: Gredos, 1961), 105ff.

The dilemma is inescapable. Either techno-scientific civilization with its conception of Man as an individual, of matter as mass, of the truth as verifiable (or falsifiable), and of reality as empiric datum is superior to every other culture—into which it integrates the “positive” aspects using pacific methods, carrying out the passage in the respect of historical rhythms and facilitating the dynamism of history without false sentimentalism—or there are other cultures not comparable to the dominant culture, similarly allowing Man to attain his fullness and realize his happiness. The question of interculturality cannot ignore this dilemma.

To sum up: if we admit that “scientific culture” is superior to all others and that other cultures are destined to disappear, it is not possible to talk of interculturality. We will talk of a universal culture, both superior and unique, enriched by the marginal contributions of the “nondeveloped cultures,” understood as more or less exotic folklore. There is no space for sentimentalism: maybe this is the destiny of the universe. Intercultural inquiry is a real challenge to the dominant culture.

The Intercultural Challenge

We cannot deny that intercultural attitude implies a risk and thus the acceptance of the human vulnerability. If we are not willing to accept this risk it will lead to a “clash of civilizations,” that is, a cultural war that could go on indefinitely, as over the last six thousand years of human history, in which the *culture of war* has prevailed over the *culture of peace*. This transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace is the life-or-death challenge facing contemporary humankind. War with “white weapons” is dangerous for Man; war with modern weapons is a menace for humanity and the planet—as already laid down by the Second Lateran Council in 1139, which forbade using them, which was an anathema for Christians.³³

Furthermore the victory of one culture over another has never led to peace. Human nature is stronger than human will. To destroy the enemy does not destroy enmity. If we burn the darnel, the wheat will also be burned (Mt 13:29–30). If the defeated are destroyed, the victors’ repressed archetypes will rouse themselves demanding “compensation.” Without anti-Semitism it is not possible to understand the state of Israel, without ancient Indochina it is not possible to understand Vietnamese resistance, just as without the Gulf War Muslim terrorism has no explanation . . . and we cannot forget that pre-Columbian America has not yet disappeared, the colonized world has not yet submitted its own “bill”—which could still occur in a violent manner. Do I have to refer to the law of *karma*?

Let us return to our theme.

Interculturality is a human imperative of our times. For the shift from a culture of war to a culture of peace to take place, the change must reach the dominion of *mythos* and not just *logos*; it follows that we must modify our myths and not just our ideas.³⁴ This transition, this passage (*pesah, pascha*) that I formulated over a quarter of a century ago and has now almost become a slogan, is the primary task of intercultural philosophy; it is the intercultural challenge of our millennium. It should be noted that we are not just talking of ethical but also of intercultural challenge. Ethics is not a challenge; it is a duty. To be good, to love others, to be sincere . . . are universal moral norms. We usually say that if we were all good, peace would reign on earth. To preach and implement peace is a universal imperative, so much so that from “right” to “left,” from “north” to “south” all more or less believe they are realizing what is good. But what is good if everyone has their own interpretation of it? We cannot

³³ See R. Panikkar, *Paz y desarme cultural* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1993), 142ff.

³⁴ See R. Panikkar, “La dialéctica de la razón armada,” *Concordia* 9 (Frankfurt a.M., 1988): 68–89.

wait for nine centuries to recognize that the Crusades were a mistake or four centuries to say that Galileo was right (at least in part). Goodness is necessary, but not sufficient. Even among the "good" there are wars and "just wars," even holy wars are fought. Humankind is not better or worse than it used to be. Intercultural challenge cannot be reduced to a question of ethics. It is no wonder that intercultural challenge is as *subversive* as it is *enriching* and at the same time just as *difficult*.

Every culture believes in its own myths, and when the relativity of the beliefs contained in them is forgotten, we run the risk of converting ideas and values of the said culture into absolutes. This is the risk of cultures that have shut themselves off from the world, or are convinced of their superiority. The encounter with other visions of the world that are incompatible with ours make us feel uneasy, insecure, and unbalanced. We cannot accept the statement that $2 + 2 = 5$. Calculating thought cannot tolerate error and must correct it. The algorithmic universe cannot make concessions to alleged superior causes that infringe on its own basic axioms. Rigorous "science" cannot tolerate that for extrinsic reasons (even if defined as moral) it is possible to hinder the freedom of research. If "science" is not intrinsically moral, either it is not true science (it is simply calculation) or it is immoral to impose unnatural restrictions on its own nature in the quest for the truth—if truth is what it is striving for.

It would be worth examining this statement in greater depth at another point.

A knife is good or bad according to what it is used for, and this is true for every first-degree tool (linked to the human body and natural sources of energy), but true science is not a tool. Science in as much as knowledge is not a means, rather it is an aim of life; it represents the way in which Man enters into communion with reality. The fragmentation of knowledge has led us to accept the existence of an authentic *gnosis* that is not salvific—of a science that destroys Man or threatens his life. One could say that it is just a question of words and that "modern science" has renounced these soteriological claims. This may be true, but then, if modern science has "patented" or even appropriated this word, we have to find another name to define the old science, which for millennia has been the symbol of human dignity: science as an activity of the intellect that allows (*capax Dei*, according to Christian tradition) Man to reach the truth, realization, *brahman*, *nirvāna*. The outcome is Man's dignity and hence his own freedom. Any externally imposed norm is nothing more than a more or less useful law, but it does not spring from the real nature of things. "Auctoritas, non veritas facit legem," as Hobbes cynically stated (*Leviathan* II.26). Every authentic *dharma* is *svadharma*, intrinsic *dharma* (see BG III.35; XVII. 47). God's traditional commandments were not "norms and rules" imposed by an external legislator, but whatever the epigones' legalistic interpretations are, it is undeniable that they were inscribed in that same human nature by the author and creator of that nature (see Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16).

Opening to interculturality is really *subversive*. It destabilizes us, it profoundly challenges deeply rooted beliefs that we take for granted, because they have never been challenged. It tells us that our own vision of the world, and therefore of our own world, is not the only one possible. Already Archytas of Taranto, the great fourth century BC mathematical sage, to whom even Plato paid a visit, refers to Pythagoras's advice: "From others you must learn questions, but answers you must find out by yourself."

At the same time, opening to interculturality is *enriching*. It allows us to grow, to be transformed; it stimulates us to be more critical, less absolutist, and it widens our scope for tolerance. Furthermore, it helps us to discover the points of intersection for the harmonious development of the culture itself in the roots of our own culture. What are the Tibetans of the diaspora doing, if not reminding Christians that meditation and inner peace were hidden

values of the Christian tradition? Maybe, if they had come as conquerors, things would have been extremely different.

Our third adjective reminds us to be prudent and realistic. The encounter of cultures is *difficult*, for it is neither easy eclecticism nor an arbitrary *cocktail*. Even though I do not want to be critical or still less pessimistic, I would say that dominant modern culture is characterized by its own superficiality and "objective" gullibility. "We" have succeeded in reaching the moon, but we know very little of the Man we sent up there: he obviously needs to be an expert at using sophisticated machines, but he seems unbothered by what, right from the times of Delphi, the Upanisads, the Tao, and Gospels, has been considered the essential element of a fully human life, that is, to know himself. Isaac Israeli, a ninth–tenth-centuries Hebrew author (not to mention innumerable other testimonies), in his *Liber de diffinitionibus* reaffirms the same idea: "philosophia est cognitio homini sui ipsius" (philosophy is Man's knowledge of himself).

It is natural to proceed cautiously so as to avoid being blinded by the glamor of the exotic, thus falling victim to a debilitating parasitism by confusing it with an enriching symbiosis.

Once more we need to acknowledge the importance of a critical and intelligent intercultural attitude, as well as the responsibility of philosophy, often infected by the virus of the superficiality of presumed objective analysis, imprisoned by concepts just as techno-science is imprisoned by experiments.

I repeat that moving from a culture of war to a culture of peace requires a change in the *mythos* and not just in the *logos*, a transformation of our own vision of reality and not simply reforming some of our ideas. This transition destabilizes six thousand years of Man's profoundly rooted convictions, during which the hero was the knight, in the quality of a king, nobleman, or a warrior—even a spiritual one. To conquer the inertia of millennia is not an easy task, and moreover we cannot manipulate our myths according to our will. We can relatively easily change our ideas, once we are convinced by "better" ideas; often we bury them in our mind, so that they do not have a *direct* influence on our life, thus creating a dichotomy between our theory and praxis. The process is different when we are dealing with myths lasting centuries and which appear to be able to adapt to and adopt different conceptual systems. We have already mentioned the persistence of the colonialist myth in modern forms of "globalization."

We cannot pilot *mythoi* according to our will: they arise of their own accord. Doubtlessly the *mythos* of peace is gaining universal acceptance; war, despite its allure in some situations, is losing its persuasive power. Two empirical insights are surfacing in current human consciousness: (1) War is synonymous with destruction. (2) Victory does not mean to win a battle, and victory does not seem to lead to peace; instead it appears to be an incentive for revenge.

God was once an almost universal symbol, but for whatever reason, that *mythos* seems less attractive now. On the other hand, peace seems to be almost universally accepted, notwithstanding different opinions about its nature and how to attain it. This polysemy is precisely one of the characteristics of the *mythos*.

At the same time we should not, and definitely cannot, separate *mythos* from *logos*, continuing, in this way, our commitment to peace without abandoning the *logos*.

When I was about to send this text to the publishing house, the modern world underwent a profound shock that directly concerns our topic, so much so that most of my statements seem to have been written *post factum*. It is still too early to make a complete evaluation, but this event makes it more urgent and important to reflect on the theme of this book. Only an understanding among cultures is able to offer us a way to peace.

September 11, 2001, the very day that Chile's president Allende was assassinated some years previously (1973), the Western world was shattered by the unexpected attack on two important symbols of the most politically powerful country in the world. After the first reactions of bewilderment and indignation, most of the rulers of the world expressed sincere and intense grief. This is a positive sign that could result in a more mature and lasting reaction than simple condemnation or punishment. We cannot know the future, but we have before us a unique chance for serene reflection and more effective action than any act of force. Criminals are not educated by punishment, which hardens the heart and encourages revenge.

Nice words are useless if they do not bring about a change in civilization (imperative to prevent human self-destruction), a change that many hope for even if they have no idea how to go about achieving it. If, as often claimed, we are living in a historical and dramatic moment, we should not forget past history. Presidents like Wilson or activists like Rev. Martin Luther King (just to mention two names from the country that was attacked) would seize the chance to initiate this hoped-for change. These moments require magnanimity, to use the words of Marco Aurelio and the people who called Gandhi *mahatma*, *magna anima*, *the great soul*. We really need a big soul to face the present human situation with serenity and equanimity. The shock has been so strong that it cannot be ignored, running the risk of missing an opportunity of establishing real peace among peoples. It was Gandhi who, after having for more than thirty years practiced and fostered nonviolence among the weaker areas of society, began to talk of nonviolence of the powerful (the rulers of India and Pakistan who were following his example). Using violence against violence only doubles its negative effects.

Real magnanimity is not simply a psychological virtue, a moral attitude, but an anthropological quality, an ontological power, which manifests itself in experience; it proves that the human soul is bigger than all the things it embraces (as we have already said quoting Aristotle). When St. John of the Cross tells us, using the language of his own time, that spiritual thought is worthier than the entire material universe, he is asking us to be open to this dimension, the same one that allows a *bodhisattva* to retain equanimity and serenity amid the suffering of the world. We cannot say that evil is not real or that injustice is purely subjective; nevertheless magnanimity does not lose the awareness of the existence of a hierarchy of values, nor does it lower itself by fighting the small-minded with the same weapons they use. We are faced with a clear example of the collateral effects linked to the oblivion of magnanimity; this is the consequence of a merely biological vision of the human beings. The loss of awareness of our own dignity, that is, of our divine nature, comes from having forgotten that God also has a human aspect. An exclusively transcendent God, besides not being credible, becomes superfluous for Man, just as an exclusively immanent God becomes superfluous, besides being perverted, insofar as it makes the evil that is within us absolute. The point is not to defend the caricature of an *ataraxia* or of an *apatheia*, "imperturbability" or "insensibility," "*tranquillitas animi*," "peace of the spirit," as translated by Cicero and Seneca, "do not be anxious" (*memerimnesete*) as the Gospels say (Mt 6:25ff.; Lk 12:11ff.) and the Christian Scriptures repeat (Phil 4:6, etc.) but to express this superiority of Man in relation to historical events. Lack of magnanimity makes us lose courage and self-confidence, forcing us to make use of the same depraved methods we condemn in others. Hence we can understand hasty reactions that find a scapegoat to justify them.

It is easy to talk of dialogue and reconciliation in theory, but to implement it is very hard, even though it is well-known that the "*lex talionis*" (the law of retaliation) has never produced either peace or authentic justice.

We all have to ask ourselves how it has been possible for violent sentiments of antipathy and even hatred to arise. We cannot answer these questions by condemning the abhorrent

acts of fanatics or by castigating colonialism, capitalism, authoritarianism, or instrumental violence. Demonizing the enemy is merely a sign of weakness. Asking for the reason behind something does not mean making moral judgments and looking for a scapegoat: "He who is *without sin among you, let him throw the first stone.*" A really immense soul is needed to overcome the blinding of quantity, but also that static quality (that does not admit a possible conversion), and to acquire the awareness that a lost sheep is equal to the other ninety-nine (Mt 18:12, etc.). Maybe more than ever the Beatitudes seem like suggestions of Realpolitik, more than a consolation for the weak in view of another life or evangelical advice for an *elite*. After six millennia of historical experience it seems to be clear that in the absence of a change in the scale of values, humankind cannot survive. It is indispensable to reach a re-conciliation, which is the convocation of a council, to a dialogue where it is possible to talk fearlessly and in complete freedom. When Men refuse to establish dialogue they act irrationally. Political dialogue is not simply a meeting of individuals, even though they may be full of goodwill: those engaged in dialogue carry the weight of the responsibility of the *polis*, which is not simply their own city.

The widespread individualism in Western society makes the comprehension of historical memory difficult and all too often causes us to forget the Crusades, slavery, and the colonial wars and other more recent conflicts, so that they remain in the archetypes of peoples of other cultures and moreover, as we have already said, of the defeated. If we are conscious of our own responsibility, we cannot but see the invitation to dialogue as the only way out. Judas was not excluded from the Last Supper, but he could not or did not want take the chance of being involved in dialogue. The hoped-for council is not a tribunal of justice. Commutative justice runs the risk of commuting only the evil inflicted; to repay a debt only creates a new debt, and it is not possible to find solace for a death with another death. Punishment not only fails to purify but is also useless as a deterrent. This is not the right time to criticize a certain theology of "redemption" or a philosophy of "scapegoats," but maybe our penal system is still influenced by a sadistic and unacceptable theology. We need a new lifestyle, also in the public forum.

Humanity has lost a myriad of occasions to bring about a *metanoia*, a change not only of mentality but of life. This is possible and reasonable today because we are about to hit the bottom, because "wars" do not appear as instruments of peace, and modern conflicts still less . . . and we are no longer using our fists, spears, or arrows! The real human weapon is the word. The *agora*, and not the *arena*, is the *dharmaksetra* (the field of fairness) where it is possible to solve human conflicts. Faith has been defined as the braveness of life. We need such courage to overcome the obsession with security, even though it can never be absolute. Without trust we cannot live. Threats do not inspire trust.

After the last world war there have been hundreds of wars resulting in more than 30 million victims, not counting the indirect effects, such as refugees, misery, and injustice: and yet we have not paid any attention to whether it was worth fighting them, nor have we assessed the desperate situation into which we have forced millions of human beings. Despite the many historical studies of great academic value on Western history in its relationships with the rest of the world, especially over the last five hundred years, Westerners have not yet realized both the responsibility of having conquered 80 percent of the earth and the cruelty of colonialism and its practice as implemented by a few European nations. If the tension between West and East escalates, as I fear, it will be used as an excuse to justify every kind of revenge. The history of the defeated is written in blood more than ink: that blood remains in the veins of humanity, and only a very healthy heart can succeed in converting it into arterial blood.

The change that is necessary, I repeat, is neither economic nor political, but rather anthropological, but it will be impossible without a theological change. So long as Man has not reestablished, in a new form, his link with the heavens, he will remain "homo homini lupus" and will not put an end to the war of all against all. We should not forget that war is a cultural phenomenon. Even though human reason seems cold and shrewd, the sentiments of the majority of the human beings represent a hope that is still alive. I have learned from the refugee camps that only forgiveness leads to peace, and I am convinced that those who have lost everything can bring this peace to those who have the privilege to be able to listen to the suffering of humankind, even without having experienced it personally. Terrorism is an aberration, but antiterrorism is no better. If by self-defense we mean the destruction of our enemy, they will feel justified in defending themselves in the same manner. Terrorism is moral evil that springs, as written explicitly in the Gospel, in the Mahabharata, and other religious texts, from the human heart, from human thought in terms of hatred and revenge, and it can only be defeated within the heart. Furthermore, antiterrorism is counterproductive. Bombing will not eliminate the desire for retaliation. For each dead terrorist there is the probability of another two dead terrorists. We have mentioned the political realism of the Sermon on the Mount.

For the last two millennia Western civilization has manifested undeniable greatness in many fields. Today it has the chance to show its true and superior greatness: the destiny of humanity is at stake. The inertia of history can only be overcome through the power of the Spirit. We all know that forgiveness is not easy, but without it only the physical, not the human, law of action and reaction is valid. Maybe we have forgotten a great virtue understood in the classical sense of strength and courage; for the Christian Scriptures these are of fundamental importance, calling them *makrothymia* and *hypomone*, which are imperfectly translated as "perseverance" and "patience" in which human salvation and freedom reside. It is meaningful that the Stoics recognized "patience" and "magnanimity" as virtues, but they do not speak of "great passion" (*makrothymia*). Ultimately great courage and fearlessness are needed to face evil and adversity. The *Tao-te Ching* says, "powerful weapons do not triumph" (76), but they are instruments of misfortune (31), and it endlessly repeats that so-called victories lead to actual defeat.

The first reactions to the above events make us fear that we are not yet sufficiently mature to implement what we are proposing. However, it is encouraging to listen to the "unofficial" voices that have faith in humanity and believe that peace is possible without the elimination of whoever thinks differently than we do.

These are not idealistic thoughts. The alternative is an atomic holocaust. An unused weapon has never existed. We are now reaping the results of the superficial education of humanity: Man no longer believes in himself and has lost the hermetic and Hindü idea that human beings are, at least potentially, superior to the Gods.

Some months have already passed, and apart from the increasing cries for common sense but few for forgiveness, it does not seem that the political world has learned much; it proceeds on its path of monocultural dominion. All that is missing are the "gas chambers."

This is not the time to preach abstract ethics. To proclaim, "Love one another," would sound scandalous if we did nothing about it. There is no love without understanding, and there is no comprehension without mutual knowledge. However, mutual knowledge requires the aspiration to understand the "other," which can only come about if there is some form of love. We find ourselves in the *vital circle* again: without recognizing reality as "grace," nothing has meaning. To perceive how indispensable this is, is already knowledge.

In 1945, after the atomic bombs, someone asked Mahatma Gandhi, "How do you see the future of humanity?" Gandhi's answer was, "First we had an option between violence and nonviolence. Now the only option is between nonviolence and nonexistence." We are coming to this point.

This study has the subtitle of a philosophical reflection because it is my firm belief that our problem is essentially philosophical, attributing to "philosophy" the meaning of the wisdom of life.³⁵ When we hear that the guilty must be punished in the name of justice, we are uncritically perpetuating a myth that has been prevalent for at least six thousand years. It is the *teologoumenon* of monotheism, according to which God is the judge and a judge's function is also to condemn, that is "to damn," because it is assumed that causing damage has a salvific value: punishment is penance and penance purifies and therefore it heals. The whole penitential system is based on this deep-rooted myth, as can be observed in the latent meaning of most of the Indo-European words indicating correction, education, sacrifice, purification, and so on. Also a large part of the Christian theory of redemption, despite the different stand of many recent important studies, presents this sadistic element:³⁶ pain is necessary to obtain redemption.

This is not the place to pursue this issue, but it is sufficient to point out that the conversion of a civilization of war into a civilization of peace cannot be reduced to a struggle by the "good," working for peace, against the "bad" who want war. The title of this meditation could have been "War or Interculturality?" Nevertheless, the dialectical alternative is not valid, first of all because interculturality is a necessary but insufficient condition for peace. We also need the magnanimity mentioned above, and still a big soul is not enough: we also need a good spirit. This touches a point where the human mind will stop if does not reach the third dimension, that of the spirit. It is at this level that forgiveness as a political solution must be placed, as an a-dualistic and inter-in-dependent relationship between religion and politics (which has nothing to do with a union between church and state).³⁷

Trust Instead of Certainty

Although the quest for certainty has become an ideal in modern Western philosophy, it cannot represent the aim of intercultural philosophy. We claim this without attempting an intercultural critique of that certainty, which has by now degenerated into an obsession with security and has led to a political, economic, and anthropological trauma of the dominant culture. It is sufficient to note that this obsession is at the root of the "justification" for the arms race; it explains the "anxiety" of unemployment, modern "depression," the fear of insecurity, and so on, although such criticism implies neither an idealization of the past nor praise of indifference.

The quest for certainty has its origins in the fear of life and death (always by nature uncertain) and in the idolatry of a certain kind of reason supposed to lead us to certainty, even though we may need a faith in God to have the final guarantee—as paradigmatically

³⁵ Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden*, in which he defends the abolition of the army as a condition for peace (I.3), has as its subtitle *Ein philosophischer Entwurf*.

³⁶ It is significant that *Il Nuovo dizionario di teologia*, ed. Paoline (Rome, 1977), avoids the entry "redemption," and dedicates only a few pages to the entry "cross." Cf. the later reflections of M. M. Gonzalez Gil, *Cristo el mistero de Dios* (Madrid: BAC, 1976), 2:112–96.

³⁷ See R. Panikkar, "Religion ou politique? Y a-t-il une solution au dilemme de l'Occident?" In *Religione e Politica* (Archivio di Filosofia), ed. M. M. Olivetti (Padova: CEDAM, 1978), 73–82.

illustrated by René Descartes. Ultimately this certainty is rooted in the rational evidence we discover in and through our own reason, and therefore we are faced with a vicious circle. It is reason itself that ensures we can trust it, once clarity of the evidence has been reached. Certainty is faith in reason itself, which the same reason endorses.

Confidence arises when we realize that our own nature impels us to rely on something that, even though it is not us, is in us. To rely on the fact they we are not alone, but in relation to the whole, leading us to cosmic confidence, seems to be the most profound impulse of creation and our own most natural tendency. Interculturality cannot be based on certainty since, even if we are sure that another culture is in error, those who belong to it are confident of the contrary. We may try to convince them, but at the moment we cannot but trust that they will recognize their own error, because it is not possible to convince anyone through force, and without conviction it is hard to reach something human and lasting.

I will refrain from speculating about the wisdom of the English word *trust*, that etymologically (from the root *dher*) suggests *truth*, *truthful*, *betrosthal*, besides *strength*, *steadiness*, and probably also *tree*, and from assuming it is a symbol of stability. Confidence means to trust, to have faith in someone or something. We trust because we believe, that is, because the heart impels us to do it and reason does not veto it: "heart (*kardia*), notwithstanding the linguistic difference between heart, *hrdaya*, and believing, which in Sanskrit also includes faith, *śraddha* (*śraddhati*: he believes, i.e., where one gives or places the heart)." Again a separation between knowledge and love is not possible without both degenerating. Confidence is based on fidelity to things, that is, on their self-identity. Trust is deeper than certainty, which depends on reason, and its role is nevertheless indispensable. Interculturality deprives us of absolute certainty, but it strengthens our trust in others and ourselves.

To avoid both cultural and individual solipsism, we must recognize an intercultural value that, as such, does not specifically belong to any particular culture. Traditionally this reality, which is both immanent and transcendent, has been called Divine, God (or Gods), the Absolute, the Unconditional, the Infinite, the Void, and even Conscience or Reason. The most natural thing for Man is to put his trust in an anthropomorphic God. But this understanding of God has suffered a threefold crisis: first of maturity, second philosophical, and finally sociological. De facto these three roads go together, and we are oversimplifying here to make our point.

On the one hand, Man, having reached a certain stage of maturity (personal and historical), tends in his philosophical reflection to purify the anthropological aspects of the Divine; on the other, he tends to purify the very idea of an omnipotent and good God who permits evil. This has led, especially in modern Western society, to leave God out of the political-social arena, creating an atheist society, more inclined to religious tolerance.

The claim of possessing God as a super-cultural value by a few has led to religious wars and consequently to cynicism—"God aligns himself with the strongest army"—therefore to the loss of trust in God. Hence, we turn our faith to Nature, which becomes the super-cultural value able to judge all cultures by virtue of their better or worse "approximation" to it. The Stoic "*vivere secundum naturam*" would be the superior criterion in which to place our trust, without needing to identify it with "God's will."

Philosophers soon realized that this concept of "nature" was differently interpreted by other thinkers and cultures. We have already touched on the discussion about so-called natural law—everyone would like to possess it or at least give the correct interpretation of it. We have also said that the difference between Man and animals is that the former is a cultural animal, that is, that culture belongs to the actual nature of Man. Culture cannot be separated from human nature; therefore it cannot be used as meta-culture in the encounter

between different cultures. By culture, we mean more than the perception that an animal has of being in a certain environment. Culture, in fact, implies the free and conscious act of nurturing such an environment.

There cannot be any meta-cultural criterion once the existence of any kind of reality beyond nature has been negated—and in saying this we are not defending any “supernaturalism” (Christians speak of divinization, not of super-nature).

I underline this point because of the presence of a certain multiculturalism that considers itself to be super-cultural. The very nature of human beings is cultural. An a-cultural being does not exist. There is no absolute loner, a human being totally cut off from humanity. A unique individual is not thinkable, except as an abstraction. Hence, no a-cultural value can exist that can be used as a universal and neutral criterion in human relations. Interculturality belongs to the human condition as well as trust. Spinoza said, “Deus sive Natura” (God or Nature), but neither of them seems to evoke trust in modern Western Man. We cannot do without *mythos*.

In dominant Western thought the next step was to enthrone Reason above all human cultures. It was at that time that the so-called comparative sciences flourished, since it was believed that in Reason the supreme requirement to compare and judge them had been found.

However, something happened to Reason, something very close to what happened both to God (“Gott mit uns”) and Nature (“natural law” is ours): each one defends its own Reason; and “faith” in the myth of Reason begins to deteriorate, despite the important distinctions that contemporary philosophy makes regarding different kinds of reason (pure, practical, instrumental, historical, communicative . . .)—in this way the many “theologies” developed.

To summarize and simplify this process:

Losing trust in God, since the idea of God has frequently degenerated into a “*deus ex machina*,” Western culture takes refuge in “pure reason,” and it cannot trust any “other,” which would be, at most, only equal to us and therefore devoid of any authority superior to ours. A man is no longer seen as a revelation or as an angel (good or bad), but rather as a foreigner, a stranger, sometimes as an enemy or, at best, as a possible competitor. In Western culture a deep and progressive rupture has arisen between “*homo homini deus*” and “*homo homini lupus*.” At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Erasmus with his “*Homo homini lupus aut deus*” summarized the dilemma that right from the “Renaissance” to our own times has become increasingly pronounced (*Adagia* I.1.69–72).

Distrust of the other (*lupus*) has led to the loss of trust in ourselves. The reason is simple: Distrust is mutual and contagious. I cannot believe I am the only lamb while all the others are wolves. We take refuge then in the power of numbers, in which we seem to find security. We can now understand why democracy is an emergency solution and technology the remedy for counterbalancing egalitarianism. If I have a three-hundred-horsepower car I am not equal to a person who possesses only a carriage with two horses. To carry a penknife in one’s pocket is different than carrying a hand grenade. We are equal, but someone who possesses a great sum of money in the bank feels more secure and protected than a simple citizen without resources. “*Bellum, omnium contra omnes*” (the war of all against all) is the phrase that summarizes Hobbes’s position. In *Leviathan* (I.14), he wrote, for instance: “*ut si hostes sint omnibus omnes*” (as if all were the enemies of all). To face the enemy, or competitor, we need security. To deal with the *aliud* we need certainty, and when faced with the *alter* trust is enough. Security is found in power (political, physical, economic, military . . .), certainty in an epistemological necessity, trust in human nature. The quest for the first is motivated by our fear, the second by our doubts, and the third by our faith. However, we are more interested in the cultural than the personal aspect.

Without trust in the other cultures, without the attitude described in the last chapters, interculturality degenerates into multiculturalism—that is, a strategy, mostly unconscious, for absorbing other visions of the world and so perpetuating the syndrome of the ideology of a superior culture. Multiculturalism claims that not all is negative in other cultures, but that we cannot trust in them too much; we can choose what is good in them, integrating it into our culture, which is superior and in this way will be further enriched. It is significant that if five states (even though they spy on each other reciprocally) possess the atomic bomb, the “world” (ours) feels secure; if these weapons fall into other hands we need the necessity of “ensuring peace” with an intercontinental network of defensive missiles.

In this context we may understand that when Christian churches began “preaching” dialogue and “discovering” positive values in other religions, the “non-Christians” feared this was a new strategy to “convert” them. Interculturality is an antidote to all of this, fostering knowledge of the other culture and mutual tolerance. It is not a one-way movement like multiculturalism; rather it requires mutual fecundation. I cannot stress enough that intercultural philosophy has immediate political and religious effects.

Coming back to our theme, what criteria can we apply to the intercultural encounter so to respect both the *ontology* of each and every culture without falling into theocratic, rational, and democratic *heteronomy* on the one hand, or into chaotic and anarchic solipsistic *autonomy* on the other?

So far we have suggested that two approaches are possible, namely to recognize the function of *mythos* and the supremacy of existence or praxis. The former presupposes faith (in the corresponding myth), the latter trust (in Man). The existence of Man on earth is a fact that precedes every interpretation. We need to believe in something that came before ourselves. “To transform necessity into virtue” is in no way a vice. Nevertheless, *mythos* is not a last-minute solution, but a constitutive fact of human reality, and ignoring it has created havoc in the world of thought. *Mythos* is the driving force of faith, the place of the belief in *something*, whether it is called God, Humanity, Reason, Matter, Order, Future, and so on, even though *logos* must then intervene to discern the values of the respective symbols.

Intercultural philosophy discovers that all these symbols are names expressing our own innate aspiration to the truth of our convictions. Yet nevertheless the awareness of the existence of the plurality of all these claims shows us the relativity of each of them, a fact that does not diminish their value and validity within the respective cultures; on the contrary it spurs us toward dialogue and mutual fecundation between cultures. The temptation of *pars pro toto*, to confuse one part (we, liberals, Christians, the poor, etc.) with the whole (humanity in this case), must be overcome by the experience of the *totum in parte*, the discovery of the whole in our respective parts. This was the insight of Man as a *mikrokosmos* in Greece or as an *âtman* in India, or the discovering of the *alter* in the *alius*.

At this point the following observation seems pertinent. Within a closed culture he who belongs to another culture is usually seen as an *aliud*, that is, a “not us,” that, at most, could be a novice, someone aspiring to enter in the circle of the “civilized.” Dialectical thinking is at work here: Christian versus non-Christian, the British versus non-British, whites versus non-white, believers versus nonbelievers, and so on, right up to “I” versus “non-I” (or “we” versus “non-we”). It is intercultural philosophy that helps us understand that the other is not an *aliud* but an *alter* and that “non-A” always hides a multiplicity (B, C, D . . .) that cannot be all inclusive. Nonbelievers, for instance, do not exist. What exists are believers in A, B, C . . . , even though the symbols of these beliefs are very different. Therefore the very notion of belief changes.

The result of this experience is pluralism, which is rooted in trust of the other, while not excluding trust in our own convictions.³⁸ Even when I am sure that the other is mistaken, I do not withdraw the trust that every human being deserves. Without this trust there can be no stable human coexistence. At this point we become aware of the emergence of one of the intercultural myths now surfacing on the human horizon: the myth of peace, which like all myths is polysemous and thus does not eliminate divergence, but places it on common ground. The desire for peace is not new. The aspiration for peace is innate in Man, but should not be confused with uniformity or an absence of conflicts. However, there is a difference that distinguishes today's interculturality. Peace cannot be based on certainty/security but must be founded on trust/confidence. A civilization like the dominant one, which believes it needs 30 million soldiers to "guarantee" peace and consumes almost half of the economic resources of the planet for so-called defense, deserves neither credibility nor trust. A Hebrew prophet says, "Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals . . . turning away their heart from the Lord" (Jer 17:5), provocatively formulating a traditional Judaic belief (Ps 117:8; 145:2-3; etc.) that is present in many other religious traditions.

Peace is far more than a purely political notion. We should learn from history. The political ideals of peace of the past (and even of today) were mostly monocultural. "Pax Romana," "Pax Americana," "economic peace," and even "Christian peace" were based on a particular ideology: "we" can and must tolerate "the barbarians," "the non-Christians," "the Third World," and even the poor, but all are expected to become "civilized," "Christians," "developed," and even rich. Through interculturality this myth collapses since it highlights its own failure and internal contradiction. The historical failure is obvious. After six thousand years of human history, humanity is not experiencing peace. An internal contradiction becomes clear: peace cannot be the fruit of a single ideology, nor the triumph of a single culture or religion.

This does not mean that we should not strive to reach a common horizon among populations living in the same space and time, namely a *mythos* that enables harmonious coexistence. We are talking about a transcendental relationship between concrete culture and intercultural values. We are all human beings, but each of us in his own way, and it is this "way" that is our concrete humanity.

One of the tasks of intercultural philosophy is to overcome this monistic mental scheme, offering a philosophical "base" for true, more authentic, and lasting human coexistence. This does not mean that interculturality is a universal panacea, but it is action and a step in the right direction.

All that has been said leads to a corollary, which is that interculturality opens us to vertical transcendence. Decades ago I wrote poetically that the shortest way from one heart to another is via the stars; the path of peace passes through the recognition that there is something in Man that transcends mere humanity, that there is something in human cultures that has come from the stars, to continue the metaphor of this consideration (con-sideration: to join the stars, *sidera*). The encounter between cultures reveals our human contingency, a tangential point of no particular dimensions that permits human coexistence even when our areas of contact are purely tangential. Only this attitude can bring peace, because it is not threatening. If an enemy attacks us we must defend ourselves, but the best defense is to reconquer his trust—which is only possible through love. "Love your enemy" is not advice for a few "perfect ones"; it is imperative for survival. It is not irrational in the intercultural experience that leads us to discover a super-cultural dimension within Man himself.

³⁸ See "Raimon Panikkar on Colonialism and Interculturality," *News* (Harvard University, Center for the Study of World Religions, Cambridge, MA, 1994), 1, 4-5.

Hieros Gamos between Knowledge and Love

Up to now we have not mentioned the problem of the existence of evil as an obstacle to intercultural dialogue. Can we hold dialogue with ill-willed people who wish to deceive or even use dialogue to impose what others see as an injustice or even a crime? This is perhaps the most important challenge to dialogue and also the biggest excuse for interrupting it. We have talked about the goodwill that can result in evil despite having "benevolent" aims, as in the case of many "just" wars. However, there is also the will to do evil that sooner or later will find a way to manifest itself. The transformation of this cannot take place through force, nor by the hand of the police, nor through veiled threats called "dissuasion." A real conversion is needed, the *metanoia* we have already talked of. This conversion requires far more than simple rational belief; it requires a true change of heart that violence cannot produce. To think that religion has nothing in common with politics or that justice is simple rationality will never bring peace.³⁹ *Intelligenti pauca!*

This is not the context to go deeper into the problem of evil, yet we cannot elude the question and the general problems it presents by falling into the Cartesian temptation of solving a human issue in a fragmentary way. The answer then depends on our understanding of evil, which in its turn depends on our vision of reality, a vision that has continually surfaced in these pages: *advaita* as the overcoming of a dialectical conception of reality. We will only make a few observations.

First of all, evil is intercultural. Therefore it is pertinent to our subject. There are no cultures that are essentially good or essentially evil. There is no absolute evil nor an absolute good. If there were, their opposite would not exist, because the Absolute has no frontiers. Evil as well as good are everywhere. Hence, evil is also within us, and it cannot be fought directly. The ancient dualistic vision of the world as the theatre of the struggle between Good and Evil, even when occasionally it has led us to believe in the victory of Good, has not eliminated Evil, as already stated by Lao-Tze. Nazism cannot be eradicated merely through military victory. Evil should not be fought directly, for a sort of chemically pure evil does not exist that abides only in the other. Dialogue is therefore not between the good and the bad, but among Men, within their respective subcultures, which, even being aware of not being perfect, are convinced of the "evil intent" of the interlocutor. Dialogue is between Men and not between abstract ideas, even if they are used within the scope of dialogue.

Once again we are faced with a collateral effect of the influence of modern science outside its own specific field: the reduction of thinking to an algebra of concepts. In our specific case it is the reduction of evil to error. Furthermore, it is believed that the cause of error is ignorance, since willful error is rationally unthinkable. However, this is precisely where the problem of evil lies: to want evil, that is, to want evil as evil. Our initial question was, "Is it possible to establish dialogue with a man of ill will?" Rationally the problem is insoluble if we eliminate love from knowledge or we confuse them in a monistic synthesis. We have repeatedly pointed to the wisdom of the *advaitic* or a-dual vision of reality that offers us a key to our problem. This attitude naturally leads to listening to the other, which is impossible without love, and the effort to understand prior to judgment. In a particular Buddhist context it is said that the presumed criminal could have been our mother in a previous life. Even though this argument might seem to be rather weak from an individualistic viewpoint, it means that we are all connected.

To avoid judging we must to a certain extent recognize that we are also potentially capable of committing a crime, therefore subject to judgment (Lk 6:37). We have already

³⁹ See Panikkar, "Religion ou politique?"

mentioned that dialogical dialogue is the source of self-knowledge. Fighting evil directly only aggravates it; to oppose evil by using its very same tools merely increases it. To bombard or economically punish a nation because it has committed a crime simply multiplies evil. We cannot fight evil using the same weapons: the "eye for an eye" leads to universal blindness.

The theme of this chapter maintains that whatever approach to reality we have, if it is without love not only does it not help to eliminate evil, but it increases it. This is not a moral thesis, but a downright anthropological assertion; it is part of human nature itself. There is no human relationship without love or without some passion, which may also include hatred. Wars begin with a breakdown in dialogue and generally cease with openness to fresh dialogue—maybe a monologue in the form of judgment or condemnation, but nevertheless a return to the word. To the initial question about the possibility of dialogue with evil, we maintained that the first step to dialogue is not a clash of ideas, even though dialectics may help clarify positions. Dialogue takes place among people and they may have ill will, but they are never completely evil.

Complete dialogue is not always possible because it requires the will to hold dialogue on both sides, but it is not impossible if one of the parts remains open to the conditions of possibility. We have to remember that the nature of the dialogical dialogue is not an exclusively doctrinal issue, but rather an attitude of the whole person, a religious act, as we have already said; to hold dialogue with the "enemy" requires a great deal of courage and magnanimity. The culture of peace is not an empty phrase; it requires a "culture" of the Spirit.

One of the functions of interculturality, enriching but difficult, consists in healing the wounds inflicted on the modern world by our fragmented approach to reality. It is sufficient to look to the traditional cultures to understand the European origin of modern cultural schizophrenia, which does not mean nostalgia for the past. We are so accustomed to the division of knowledge that we are hardly aware of the cultural schizophrenia represented by such divisions: on the one hand the divine and on the other the human and then again also a material aspect; matter versus spirit, body against soul, and many more mortal dualisms.

Not all is negative in "modernity." Our very criticism is the fruit of what we have learned from it. We may also understand the oscillating reaction that, confronted with the globalizing, undifferentiated, and most of the time uncritical visions of the past, leads to extreme specialization, creating separation where distinction would suffice. Interculturality invites us to assume a new and more mature attitude, avoiding the two extremes mentioned above. The positive aspect of contemporary globalization is the fact that it reminds us that everything is linked with everything else and could also be interpreted as a reaction to the fragmentation of life. Obviously the cement cannot be economics or a particular ideology. We are not creating a conglomerate or a synthesis. It must spring from the depths of the real. The Vedas say, "In the beginning there was Love (*kama*), the first seed of the mind" (Rig Veda X.129.4; *Atharva-veda* XIX.52.1). Connection must be natural, stemming from the *mythos* of humankind (and from the cosmos, too). This is the universal solidarity that most of the religious traditions refer to with the various names of *buddhakaya*, the mystical body of Christ, *karma*, and so on—even if sometimes with more or less artificial limitations.

The fragmentation of knowledge has brought about the fragmentation of the knower. I will limit myself to only one example: the divorce between knowledge and love, usually interpreted as two independent faculties of human beings. In describing philosophy not simply as "the love of wisdom," but also as "the wisdom of love" I am not just playing with words. In both cases we are before a subjective genitive. Knowledge without love is mere reckoning, incapable of penetrating into what is known; love without knowledge is simply emotion, there is no identification with what is loved.

An important example from Western culture may help us to understand the importance of the problem. European "Illuminism" represents an inspired effort to base individual and political human life on rationality: Man is a rational animal and reason is the ultimate criterion of truth and therefore of reality. From Descartes to Husserl the backbone of modernity with all its creation, from "science" to "democracy," has been developed. Principles of thought and action must be rational. Kant could be the paradigm here. Reason is the queen; her reign is by definition immanence: immanence is whatever falls into the field of reason. If something is "outside" it is irrational, not human; religion must be "within the limits of reason," and knowledge cannot overcome phenomena, that is, what falls into the field of reason. God, transcendence, can only be a postulate of so-called practical reason. It is meaningful that Kant substitutes "transcendental" with "transcendent." Reason must be the foundation of all; but how can reason endorse its own rightness? Schelling would struggle desperately to find a foundation to the absolute I, so as to escape Hegel's monism. Aesthetic intuition is his answer—and this is where the crisis of modernity begins: an art able to escape the canons of rationality.

We will not develop this question at this point. May it suffice to underline its importance in the intercultural encounter. Whatever the approach to another culture, if it is without love, it is a violation of the other culture. Whatever the approach, if it is without knowledge, it is more or less an immoral seduction. I mean something more than mere empathy; I am talking about an overcoming of both objective information and subjective sympathy. "Knowledge" brimming only with compassion and sympathy, with the desire to do good (however commendable), is not the type of knowledge I am referring to, just as "love" brimming only with curiosity and attraction (despite being sincere and praiseworthy) is not the type of love I am talking about. Love controlled and directed by reason is not love. Knowledge seduced by sentiment is not knowledge, but this does not mean that "control" and "seduction" cannot be intermediary steps. The relationship between knowledge and love is not dualistic. One cannot exist without the other; nevertheless they are not the same thing. Love is not only the prior condition for knowledge ("de ignoto nulla cupido"). Knowledge is not only the prior condition for love ("nihil volitum quin praecognitum"). Their relationship is intrinsic and constitutive. When our senses put us into contact with a certain aspect of reality, "the faculty" that overcomes our solipsism, permits us to "touch," "see," and be in "contact" with reality, is our own loving/knowing nature. We lose an adequate definition in our ordinary language for this, at the point when "heart" loses its symbolic power. The religious traditions claim that "the pure of heart will see God" (Mt 5:8), "*ātman* is found in the heart" (*Chandogya-upanishad* VII.3.3), "*hrdayam*, heart, is Prajapati, is *brahman*, is the Whole" (*Bṛhadaranyaka-upanishad* V.3.1). Heart, *dal*, *qalb*, and so forth is one of the cardinal points of Sufism. A verse from the Prophet says that the Qur'an is an admonition to the memory of one who has heart (50.37). An expression in the Christian Scriptures talks of the "eyes of the heart" (Eph 1:18) to express this union between mind and heart, intellect and love. The same expression appears in the *Corpus hermeticum* (VII.1), not long after St. Paul's letter. It is not therefore a "blind love" or cold intellect but Man's loving vision symbolized by the heart. The Christian scholars said *Fides oculata*, a faith that sees. In the twelfth century the Vittorini monks spoke of *oculus fidei*, talking about the third eye together with the eyes of mind and senses. The eyes of the heart are as independent as those of the mind and the senses.

Interculturality requires the spoken word, richer than the written word, but also art, dance, culture, painting, song, architecture, and the living symbols of every artistic expression, not separated from their eidetic dynamism.

The frontiers of concepts are delimited by the field in which they arose, while for symbols such limits do not exist. They require living rather than simply eidetic participation, empathy of a different nature, yet they are not universal. A certain kind of music can "speak to us" and place us to a kind of human conviviality in a different atmosphere to that of a purely speculative encounter. In the *Republic* Plato said that to change the music of a country is more important than changing its constitution.

I am not referring only to the intellectual value of important artistic works, rather to the role of Man's artistic dimension without minimizing the former. Even stretching the boundaries of rationality, there is more to the human realm than mere reason. Musical choirs may contribute to the reciprocal fecundation among cultures, as much as or more than scholarly academic meetings. As a *memento* of the wisdom of the words every "symposium" should honor its own etymology and be a human celebration just as much as an encounter of minds; to celebrate together is part of interculturality.

Liturgy is an essential factor in intercultural encounters. To read a Hindü text, for instance, is quite different from taking part in an Indian dance or participating in a popular festival in honor of Ganesh. I will simply underline the importance of the argument, limiting my observations to a single and more theoretical aspect than this huge field.

If we approach another culture with our own objective categories and with the intention of comparing it (obviously to "our own"), we can only see it as "other" (*alia*). The "other" culture can be the object of our objective knowledge, but then we cannot penetrate its subjectivity as we fail to grasp how it sees itself; we are not seeing it as *altera*, as another face (completing, correcting, or even contradicting ours). For instance, what is still called "Orientalism" attempts to be the objective study of Eastern culture. Until the myth of such objectification was revealed, it was seen as normal to have university chairs of "Orientalism" but there were no chairs of "Occidentalism."⁴⁰ "Orientalism" honored those from the East, the object of study by experts, while "Occidentalism" was meaningless, since Western culture was the model for all studies and the normal framework of culture. It seemed normal to ask how Buddhists managed without a notion of "God," while it wasn't important to ask how Christians coped without the symbol of *buddhā* (authentic nature). It was and is still deemed to be legitimate to investigate whether traces of "human rights" can be found in Hinduism, but it is seen as meaningless to investigate if Westerners have some understanding of *ātman* or some notion of *svadharma*.

Sometimes we discover what the other culture "is," but we forget that the other culture does not see itself as an "is." It does not objectify itself. This works both ways: we are his "other." Within the dialectical field our encounter can take place only in the arena of abstract objectivity and not in the *agora* of complete rapport.

The picture changes if, through loving knowledge and knowing love, we discover the other not as an *aliud* (a stranger), but as an *alter* (a friend)—in other words, if we are capable of seeing the other not as a *he* or a *she*, rather as a *you*, the you of our I. Then our relationship is human. You is not a he or a she, nor an I. You is the *you* of the I, of the (true) I, that is the I of the you. The relationship does not go into the dialectics of noncontradiction, but goes beyond simple *logos* (without destroying it), to establish a connection with the fluid *mythos*, which is slowly forming as the dialogue itself develops. The you is neither I nor the non-I. However, to discover the *you*, the I must love it and vice versa, and the you will make this discovery possible by loving the I and being loved by it. This is another example of vital circle in contrast to the dialectical one.

⁴⁰ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), without entering into the merits of this work.

Right from the beginning of Greek philosophical speculation, maybe because it arose as criticism of the magical-mythological vision, philosophy, despite its name, has focussed on *gnosis* (intellect) rather than *filia* (*agape* or *eros*). Even in India the path of love (*bhakti*) is considered inferior to the way of knowledge (*jnana*), despite a certain synthesis in the Gita. Maybe it is the task of modern Man to unite romanticism, philosophy of the sentiment, mystical currents, and a certain critical spirituality with the *opus rationis* of modern philosophy in a harmonious, not eclectic, whole, where Man's two great strengths (intellect and love) flow together in an a-dualistic polarity.⁴¹ At this level different cultures in history can find a common starting point.

Hence, there is neither the absorption of one culture by the other, nor atomistic independence between them. A correlation exists, thanks to which the other culture is foreign to us, thanks to which we may even not understand it, but we know it by loving it and love it by knowing it, without defiling the mystery of the you through it, even though maybe we do not understand it. Consequently I have introduced the notion of *inter-in-dependence*, implying the vision of a living reality where every being, though linked to the whole (*ontonomically*) has his degree of freedom. In fact, world cultures are inter-in-dependent, and interculturality respects these degrees of freedom, opening themselves to possible mutual dialogical fecundation.

Coming back to our theme in more academic terms, what is the epistemological condition for interculturality? The answer is simple. We cannot know this condition a priori. The very basis of the encounter must always be founded on concrete dialogue. As already mentioned above, interculturality is more an *attitude* than an abstract form of knowledge.

Interculturality arises in the existential encounter of different visions of the world, which actually can encounter one another when they do not reject genuine encounter and the opening of the intimate nucleus of their respective cultures. Basically it is a religious encounter, since it investigates the ultimate meaning of life and reality. To understand the other, an effort is required and preceded by the intention of knowing him and made possible by sympathy (com-*passion*), an attribute neglected by divinity, even though greatly emphasized by the Christian Scriptures (2 Cor 1:3) and is part of the Sermon on the Mount (Lk 6:36). On a more anthropological level, we could talk of the aspiration (tendency) to know the other (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.1). To know the other is to know oneself, since our I is not an isolated monad, and the other, as *alter*, is "part" of the I. To know oneself is to know everything, as claimed by Proclo, the *Liber de causis*, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Meister Eckhart, and many others, since Man is a microcosm and a *mikrotheos*. It should be sufficiently clear that dialogical dialogue is not a luxury for intellectuals but a constitutive element of Man himself.

I could have called this chapter *prajna-karuna-mithuna*: the union of knowledge and compassion. The two pillars of Mahayana Buddhism are in reality wisdom (knowledge) and loving-kindness (compassion), which belong to each other and are nurtured in intrinsic harmony. If *prajna* opens us to an impersonal good, *karuna* opens us to a personal truth, and together they constitute the beauty of human life. Thus "good" has been correlated with impersonality, "truth" with persons, and "beauty" with life. Meister Eckhart, commenting on St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 4:16 ff., says, "Veritas quasi via dei ad hominem interiore, caritas via hominis ad deum" (Truth is like God's path toward interior man, love man's path to God).

This attitude also arises when we have overcome the temptation to believe that we are self-sufficient (personally and culturally). Opening to the other springs from the experience of our contingency, since only then can we recognize the other as a subject, as a source of

⁴¹ See Panikkar, "Advaita and bhakti," in *Mito, fede e ermeneutica*, 275–85.

knowledge and love, and not simply as an object of our own research. That is why we talk about *mithuna*, *hieros gamos*, a sacred matrimony—the *alius* is transformed into an *alter*, into an *altera* to follow the nuptial simile, or vice versa.

The intercultural attitude is incompatible with the obsession for objectivity. In no “sacred union” is the other a mere object. Cultures cannot be the object of a purely objective study, simply because they are not objects. They are the “magma,” enveloping both object and subject. I have already described culture as the all-encompassing myth, reigning in a particular time and space.

“Sacred matrimony” does not divide reality between an “I” (a myself) and a “non-I,” governed by dialectics that, despite every effort, never ceases to be dualistic and solely corrects itself by taking refuge in an immanent or transcendent monism. In this *hieros gamos*, reality is neither split nor fragmented into different parts, but rather subsists in its own a-duality, which is that of radical connectivity. The other culture is not part of a self-centered ego, but neither is it alien: we are correlated. This relationship belongs neither to heteronomy nor to autonomy, rather to “ontonomy,” in which the *nomos* of the *on* belongs to our common *myth* (in any case, concrete). Without the union of knowledge and love, interculturality is merely a utopia: the *hieros gamos* between love and knowledge is a hope for humankind.

Nine Sutras on Peace

Sūtras are like the rings of a single gold chain: one leads to the other, and all together they form the jewels we call peace.

Peace is participation in the harmony of the rhythm of Being.

Peace does not mean absence of strength or polarity. Peace does not do violence to the rhythm of reality. But nonviolence does not mean a merely passive attitude of permissiveness, absence of resistance, or lack of strength or even power. Rather it means respect, nonviolation of the individual, and furthermore of the intimate dignity of every being. Peace does not entail the homogenization of everything. It means the participation in and the contribution to the constitutive rhythm of Reality. The human being is not only a social being; he is also a cosmic being, or better cosmotheandric. We are also responsible for the harmony of the universe. We enhance and transform it by cooperating with it. This cooperation, this synergy, is both active and passive all in one. Participation entails both an active and passive taking part in the adventure of Being; as in dance, movement is created by following the music. This adventure is neither a linear progression toward a final omega point nor a regression toward an indiscriminate and original alpha point. Peace is neither eschatological nor a state of mind that has “discovered” the vanity of all “transient” things. The meaning of our life is neither to be found only at the end, and the justification of our actions in their final success, nor can we be satisfied with momentary satisfactions. Blessed are the ones who find their goal during their journey. The “aim” of life is to be found in the journey. The adventure of Being is neither an evolution toward the future nor an involution toward the past. Peace, like Being, is neither static nor dynamic. Being is not even dialectically moving between those two states in a more or less latent way. Being is rhythmic, and rhythm is the a-dualistic integration of movement and stillness, of tending toward the goal and of being able to enjoy it while we are still pilgrims on the way. The goal is the end of the pilgrimage wherever we are, even today. Rhythm is the deepest nature of Reality, the very becoming of Being, which is the Be-ing precisely because it comes to Be.

From a so conceived philosophy of peace stems a deep and constructive criticism of the situation of uneasiness visible in religious, ecological, economical, psychological, and political fields. Our technocratic culture, which by the cult of acceleration has infringed on the normal rhythms of nature and mind, has produced an unpeaceful society that makes the realization of peace in our times both urgent and difficult. This does not mean that ancient times did not have their own problems from which we can learn. Peace doesn't mean maintaining the unjust status quo. I'm not proposing the war against, but the emancipation from the status quo and its transformation into a *flux quo*, a movement toward an ever new and never perfect cosmic harmony. All too often, talk of peace tends to become idyllic dreams of an ideal paradise, forgetting that the essence of Eden consists in having been lost and that the destiny of Man lies in overcoming—not denying—the temporal limits in which we all run the risk of being drowned.

It is difficult to live without external peace; it is impossible to live without inner peace. The relationship is a-dualistic (advaitic).

It is dangerous and upsetting to live in any context of war or conflict. The world is full of both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized injustice that destroy peace. From the last world war onward, more than fifteen hundred people have been killed every day because of wars, and there are millions of refugees in the world, children living alone on the roads as well as starving people. We should not minimize human suffering, but if there is an inner peace, there is still some possibility of surviving. Without inner peace, people are disintegrated and peoples are destroyed. Crime, drugs, and many other individual and social wounds stem from not having inner peace. The rate of criminality has been rising throughout the world, and the increase in defense measures will surely not be able to reduce them.

Peace is more than the absence of military conflicts. If there is not peace within us there cannot be peace around us. Lack of inner peace generates competition, leading to defeat and then to declared or undeclared revenge. On the other hand, it is not possible to fully enjoy inner peace if our human and ecological environment is subject to violence and injustice. Vice versa, without external peace, inner peace is only an incomplete, superficial, or in an exclusively psychological state of artificial isolation from the rest of reality. The *Bodhisattva* renounces *nirvāṇa* to liberate all human beings, Jesus suffers because of his love for the universe, but none of them loses their inner peace. No mature spirituality proposes a real "*fuga mundi*," and no sage can close himself up in his egotism or in his own self-sufficiency.

The a-dualistic relation between inner and external peace reveals, at the same time, both a reciprocal and sui generis connection. Inner peace communicates external peace, and the latter nurtures inner peace. Likewise, inner disorder produces external conflict, and the latter spurs interior degradation. Nevertheless this relationship is of inter-in-dependence. Have we not met people who have a mysterious and fascinating serenity—that is not insensitivity—in the middle of unjust and catastrophic situations? But, at the same time, have we not been witnesses to inexplicable depressions in externally optimal life conditions? The whole of the universe is part of this adventure. The philosophy of life, intended as "wisdom of love" of life itself, helps us to overcome the dichotomy between interiority and exteriority, giving us the chance of enjoying inner peace in the midst of external suffering and of committing ourselves to alleviating injustice without losing our inner peace.

Peace is not conquered for ourselves, nor is it imposed on others. It is both received (discovered) and created. It is a gift (of the Spirit).

Neither masochistic spiritualities nor sadistic pedagogy, at whatever level, lead to peace. We cannot fight for peace; we fight for our rights or possibly for justice, but never for peace. It is a contradiction. Imposed regimes do not represent peace for those who are subjected to them, be they children, foreigners, pagans, rebels, the poor, families, or nations. Today's human being lacks that specifically feminine attitude of knowing how to receive, and when we receive, of transforming what we have accepted. By feminine attitude I mean the complementary aspect of what a certain exclusively masculine mentality has associated to positive values. Nonviolence, for instance, is typically feminine (this does not mean that it is women's exclusive prerogative), requiring far more courage than a warfaring attitude.

We accept peace as a gift, but this gift is not a toy. It is a stimulus, an aspiration, *nixus*, *spanda*, *elan*. Peace is not a prepackaged condition or a purely objective datum. Christ wanted us to receive his peace; he did not want to impose it on us, nor did he want us to impose it on others (Jn 14:27; Mt 10:13; etc.). The nature of peace is grace, gift. To be able to receive peace, wherever it comes from, is a sign of wisdom. "By this invocation of peace may peace bring peace," sings a Vedic hymn (*Atharva-veda* XIX.9.14).

We discover peace: it is a discovery, not a conquest. It is the result of a revelation; we may experience it as the revelation of love, of God, of the beauty of reality, of the existence of providence, of a hidden meaning, of the harmony of being, of hope, of justice, of the pure love of he who loves or even of suffering and persecution.

Peace must be continuously nurtured and even created. A recipe for peace does not exist, nor any preconstituted plan to conquer it, nor, once innocence is lost, can we reach it by going back to the primitive state. Peace must be deeply searched for time and again. It is both a gift and a donation.

Victory obtained by violently defeating the enemy will never lead to peace.

This is both a theoretical statement and an empirical judgment. This is witnessed by the more than eight thousand peace treaties stipulated over the millennia of human history. No victory ever has brought about real peace and not through any fault in human nature, since most wars have been waged and justified as the correction of previous peace treaties. The archetypes of the defeated, if not actually their own children, sooner or later will emerge, asking for what has been denied them. Nor will the repression of evil lead to permanent results. "He who wins generates hatred," says the *Dhammapada* (XV.5). It is spontaneous to recall the teaching of the young rabbi of Nazareth, so simple and yet difficult, who exhorted us to let wheat and weeds grow together. . . .

We may even ask if the history of the American continent has not been marked by the law of *karma* weighing down the soul, not to speak of the archetypes of the European descendants who have "taken the place" of the original inhabitants. The same thing could be said about the Islamic conquests or of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. However, historical categories are of a different order from those applicable to individuals.

Peace escapes the winners, I would say, paraphrasing Simone Weil. Peace is more than simple justice; it is richer than *pax* as simple pact, a sort of balance, often based on the fear or dread of revenge. Peace is not reestablishing a broken order: it is the constant advent of a new order.

It is a historical fact that victory leads to victory, not to peace. We well know the disastrous collateral effects of prolonged "victories." At the root of this sutra there is a more theoretical

foundation. Notwithstanding all our distinctions, victory always means the victory of a people over another or of a person over another, and people and human beings are never absolutely evil. At a theoretical level we cannot say then that the victory is only over the forces of evil or against aberrations or errors. Maybe our intention is to simply destroy evil, but we eliminate the evildoer; we want to punish the crime, but we punish the criminal. "Do not oppose evil," says the same rabbi, in an irritating manner and almost as a provocation!

Even if we prudently abstain from making absolute statements, since, for a start, we ourselves are not absolute, we cannot ignore the other assumption lying at the root of this sutra: the nature of reality is not dialectical, not reducible to logical dynamism, nor does it proceed by a synthesis of opposites. Peace is not the contrary of war. The elimination of war does not automatically flow into peace. This is the reason why the path toward true peace is not victory over human beings. The defeated do not enjoy the peace of the winners. Peace is not the result of a dialectical process of good versus evil. Peace cannot be confused with an abstract concept. Nor is peace the means to acquire a happy but meaningless life, as the Semitic words *shalôm* and *salam* suggest. "Christ is our peace" (Eph 2:14). Peace is *beatitudo*, *nirvāṇa*, *moksa*, the ultimate value of life.

Military disarmament requires cultural disarmament.

We have to disarm our own respective cultures alongside with and sometimes previously to a mere elimination of arms. Our cultures are often bellicose, treating the others as enemies, barbarians, *goi*, *mleccha*, *khaḍir*, savages, primitives, pagans, nonbelievers, intolerants, underdeveloped, and so on. Furthermore, in many cultures reason itself is adopted as a weapon to win, even though it is said to convince.

Cultural disarmament is not only a catchphrase but, in the current situation, an indispensable requisite to assure peace and reach lasting disarmament. First of all, it is not by chance that the dominant civilization has developed such a terrible arsenal of weapons both qualitatively and quantitatively, later imitated by other populations, in their turn convinced that this is the only means to be heard and acquire power. What is it in Western culture that has led to this situation? Competition, the search for "better" solutions, neglecting the possibility of facing the causes and solving the problem at the root, the attraction for the quantitative and mechanical, creativity in the field of objectifiable entities to the detriment of arts and crafts, subjectivity, indifference to the world of sentiments, a sense of superiority, universality, and so on. An example of such an attitude stems from the fact that politicians' and intellectuals' discourses practically neglect these fundamental themes. Nevertheless, cultural disarmament is as difficult as military disarmament. We become vulnerable. It is well-known that military disarming is an economic problem and not only a political issue. But the economic aspect is fundamentally a cultural problem. The passage from agriculture, as a way of life, to agribusiness, as means of financial gain, could be a good example of what we are trying to say.

It is utopian to uphold military disarming without this cultural disarming, that is, without the introduction of a new scale of values. The point is not to renounce any positive value, but to differently evaluate the positive aspect of many "values." We should not confuse poverty with destitution, authority with power, humility with weakness, innocence with stupidity, happiness with pleasure, freedom with whims, development with more industrialization, and so on.

Maybe what has become manifest in the technocratic culture was already potentially present in the cultural project of historical Man. We should pay more attention to the lesson

from history and start contemplating the possibility that Man is something more than a historical being. Ultimately it is an issue of survival. To believe in succeeding in eliminating the so-called terrorists, for instance, apart from moral considerations, is an impossible dream: every terrorist victim creates new terrorists.

Our time is ripe for such an anthropological mutation. The word "mutation" is usually intended in a biological sense. With anthropological mutation we refer to the mutation of that being, Man, whose self-awareness belongs to his own nature. A human being is not only what he "is"; he is also what he believes to be. Human subjectivity belongs to what Man is—not exclusively an object, but also a subject.

Cultural disarmament does not mean to revert to primitive life, but presupposes a criticism of culture not only in the light of what has not functioned correctly in Western culture but also in the perspective of a genuine intercultural approach.

No culture, religion, or tradition in isolation can solve the problems of the world.

Today, no culture is self-sufficient, nor can it give universal answers (also because the instances are different). Intercultural approaches to the problems of the world are imperative. We are still suffering from the aftermath of colonialism, the essence of which rests on monoculturalism, while instead we need others and we depend on all levels on others in a relation of inter-in-dependence.

It is meaningful that while religions seem to be ready to give up their pretension of universality, the so-called scientific vision of the world seems to be still attached to it. I am talking about peace on Earth and in heaven, and not assessing if, in a very limited context, a particular "physical law" is more or less valid. To sum up: science alone cannot lead us to peace. The human problem is human and not only technical or moral.

The interconnection that has been reached by humanity makes the human and cosmic communion more tangible and physical; they form, as affirmed by many traditions, only one body—cosmic, of God, of Buddha, of Christ. . . .

If everything has repercussions on everything and yet human beings and cultures are different, the essential characteristic of all cultures, religions, and traditions is *pluralism*, the basis for interculturality. The great temptation would be to confuse pluralism with anarchical plurality or fall into the opposite extreme of nihilism. To avoid this interpretation the same *sutra* could be formulated in the opposite sense, saying that every culture, religion, and tradition offers a means of salvation to the one who discovers (in it) the ineffable core of the human being. It would be a sign of immaturity to fall into an individualistic solipsism and abandon the respective human communities, because the religious and cultural history of humankind is everything but a triumphal path. The evolution of the technological world gives us an important awareness: we cannot go on in this direction. It is not enough to reduce the acceleration, since it is essential for industrial civilization. What we need today is a radical change (*metanoia*). This is the hidden and paradoxical revelation of the technological civilization that, having ruled the world and scrutinized its own secrets, makes us ready to commit ourselves to the discovery of the human mystery and to a more mature experience of the divine. I think this was the message of *Goethe* in his *Faust*.

We insist again on the importance of pluralism: without recognizing interculturality there cannot be peace in the world or, to put it differently, interculturality is the foundation of peace. Many attempts have been made to establish world peace. Ultimately, peace is a universal aspiration, but the many attempts have always been based, from the first empires

to the "*Pax Americana*," upon the insights (even if great) of a single culture, exclusively on the *logos*, on an ideology (Assyrian, Roman, Christian, democratic, capitalistic . . .), that is, not taking on interculturality as the constitutive element of the human nature.

Peace essentially belongs to the order of mythos, not of logos.

There is not one single concept of peace. We may think of the different resonance and connotations of the diverse words: *pax, eirene, salam, shalom, mir, Friede, vanti*. . . "Peace" is a polysemous word: it has many meanings. It is also pluralistic: it has many doctrinally incompatible interpretations. My notion of peace cannot coincide with that of others. Peace is not an ideology. Peace is not synonymous of pacifism. Myth is something we believe in because we accept it a priori: it is not incomprehensible or irrational, but it is what makes comprehension comprehensible and reason reasonable. It is what allows intelligibility in a certain situation. Peace is not just a concept but the emerging myth of our times.

"God" used to be an almost universal myth. Wars were waged in His name, and each of the contenders wanted God on his side: "Gott mit uns," "in God we trust." Even peace used to be signed in the name of God. We might say that now our myth is peace and wars are fought in its name!

But the myth thwarts every other foundation; it goes beyond every possible definition, because it makes up the horizon that makes the definition itself possible. *Mythos* cannot be severed from *logos*, but the two are not to be identified with each other: it follows that imposing our own *concept* of peace does not lead to peace.

To respect pluralism we prefer to say that peace is a *mythos* rather an ideal. Humanity is tired of wars in the name of peace. The ideal of peace is our ideal and may differ from the ideal of peace of other peoples. Communion in the *mythos* does not eliminate conflicts, but allows for flexibility that ideas cannot tolerate.

Religion is a path toward peace.

Religion was traditionally seen as a way to salvation. People were willing to fight for their salvation, which is why so many wars were religious ones. Today, we are witnessing a transformation of the very notion of religion, so we may sustain that religions are different ways of approaching and gaining that peace, which perhaps remains one of the few universally shared symbols.

"Summa nostrae religionis pax est et unanimitas" (The essence of our religion is peace and concord), wrote Erasmus in a letter in 1522. We have already said that peace is (an) end and not (a) means. To say that the belief in God is useful is equal to converting God into a means.

Linking this *sutra* to the previous one, we avoid the peril of falling into that superficial eclecticism that could eliminate all religious diversities, reducing religions to a purely abstract common denominator. Religions are not—and are not presumed to be—all the same: in fact they affirm different things and speak different languages, but in most of them the same significance or the same "thing" is not separated. Words are fundamental in most of the religions that, nevertheless, agree in recognizing their task is to bring peace to Man and to all the cosmos. Every religion considers peace as a polysemous symbol and sufficiently pluralistic to be able to use it.

This is a step forward, since it shifts the emphasis of the religious encounter (in all senses of the word) from doctrinal problems to a more existential attitude, thus making the beginning of fecund cooperation among different religions possible. In the past, religions have contributed to the inner peace of their followers, but they have fostered war against

the others. This inconsistency is so obvious today that the self-understanding of religion is beginning to change in the sense indicated above.

In the relation between peace and religion, a difficult word, once fashionable in many circles and now seen almost with suspicion, is gaining ground: revolution. The way to peace is not smooth, it is revolutionary, upsetting, challenging, and it requires the removal of injustice, egotism, and greed. History shows that, as soon as religions stop being revolutionary, first, they degenerate not bringing their role to fulfillment, and second, they cause the revolution itself to become nothing more than a changing of the guard. Problems today are extremely serious. Religions should tend more to human transformation than to the solution of inner human problems.

In the past, Western philosophy aimed at the salvation of Man, implying, as in the case of Eastern philosophy, a lifestyle. Nowadays, not only philosophy but even religion tends to convert itself into a system of beliefs more than into vital orthopraxis. The intercultural challenge consists in reminding us of this existential function of the religions. In this sense we could talk of the revolutionary function of the religions, leading us to realization. *Corpus hermeticum* (X.24) says that Man is a divine living being more than a terrestrial animal, even if "he does not have to leave the earth to reach the altitudes of the heaven" (X.25).

This way to peace is a path of justice, and justice must be vigilant so as to avoid the exploitation of the weak. "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:52). This is the revolution and the meaning of the defense of the poor. To know God is to defend the right of the poor and needy, says one of the prophets of Israel (Jer 22:16).

*Only forgiveness, reconciliation, and constant dialogue
bring peace and break the law of karma.*

This is perhaps the most demanding and important *sutra*, the historical ascertainment and affirmation of an anthropological and theological-philosophical truth. Modernity insists, and with reason, on the importance and centrality of Man, but it seems to have forgotten his infinite, or divine (as Hinduism and Christianity would say) dignity, and, with a different word, also other religions. Since the sense of the responsibility of Man, this microcosm, escapes our understanding, we look for small remedies to the big problems of history and universe. Man, this mediator between heaven and earth, as affirmed by ancient Chinese culture, has a cosmic vocation, or, I would say, cosmotheandric. Our *sutra* talks of forgiveness at this level; otherwise it would deteriorate into purely superficial sentimentalism. Forgiveness is the great challenge, reminding Man of his unique role in the harmony of the universe. Punishment, compensation, reparation, restitution, and so on do not lead to peace. To believe that a simple reestablishment of the broken order could solve the problem is an immature and mechanical way of thinking. Lost innocence needs redemption, that is, liberty, and not the dream of a lost paradise. No sum, no compensation can repay what has been done. Peace is not restoration. Human history is dynamic; the same cosmos moves in a rhythmic way, but it does not repeat itself. The status quo ante is an impossibility.

The only way toward peace is first of all a path that goes "forwards," and not "backwards." Forgiveness is an act transcending the basic dogma of modernity: will. "Der Wille ist das Urseyn" (the will is the primordial Being), as claimed by German idealism. To have the will to forgive does not depend in the first instance on will. If my heart doesn't spontaneously lead me to forgiveness, I cannot will it, nor conceive it, and talking about it would be hypocrisy. To have decided to forgive is a first step, but it is not equivalent to forgiveness. To forgive is necessarily a power beyond the mechanical law of action and reaction. The act

of forgiveness is not the result of a rational syllogism; to truly forgive, one needs the power of the Spirit. *Karuna*, *charis*, and love are not simply the good sentiments of a few people, but the pillars of the universe.

It is full of significance that every time the risen Christ appears to his disciples he bestows peace on them, and that on every occasion in which he confers the power of forgiveness, he gives them the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the law of *karma* is interrupted, making the very holders of the justice feel ashamed: "Woman, where are those who accused you?"

Forgiveness is not a purely juridical action. It is not how to condone a debt; it is an ontological act that makes the guilt disappear. Only God can forgive, say theistic traditions (Is 43:25; Lk 5:21; etc.), only the newness of every moment can overcome the inertia of the past, as maintained by other theistic traditions. Forgiveness is an act of "de-creation." It annuls the guilt, it is an active participation in the *creatio continua*, and it is the overcoming of the mechanical causality, thanks to the power of freedom. Thus we can affirm that the historical responsibility of Man is seen in the fact that if we do not forgive Hitler (for instance), a new contemporary despot will arise. Forgiveness does not go against real justice, nor against the right of self-defense of the individual or society; but it goes against revenge and a mechanical vision of life and reality. We can judge with justice only when we have forgiven. Without acknowledging a third dimension of reality, there is no forgiveness.

The consequences are so huge that they cannot be expounded briefly here.

I know how easy it would be to cite the edict of peace of Emperor Asoka (the victory of the *dhamma*, as he defined it), or to condemn Flavio Vegezio Renato: "qui desiderat pacem praeparet bellum" (if you want peace, prepare war), or the famous aphorism of Pindar: "dulce bellum inexpertis" (war is sweet only for people who have not have experienced it), or to reproduce the beginning of the *Quaerela pacis* of Erasmus (peace is "the source of every happiness"), and the many other noble souls who have discovered the centrality of peace in all times and places. The real challenge comes when we have to act consistently without other support but our consciousness.

In our world, so ambivalent, so full of the signs of death, but also full of signs of resurrection, intercultural philosophy seems to be an epiphany of hope. May these thoughts make us more conscious of our dignity and responsibility.

Glossary

Unless otherwise specified the terms in the glossary are all Sanskrit.

abhava: non-existence.

Absolutheitsanspruch (ger.): claim or right to absoluteness.

adharma: that which is not in accord with *dharma*, which violates the Universal Order or the Law, disharmony.

advaita: a-duality. Metaphysical expression of the irreducibility of the real to pure unity (monism) or mere duality, philosophically elaborated by many religions, above all in the East.

ahiṃsā: "non-violence," respect for life, not killing and not wounding, not desiring to carry out violence against reality. A moral and philosophical principle based on ultimate universal harmony. The root *hiṃs-* from *han-* means "to wound," "to kill." This is not exactly a Vedic notion—it appears only a few times in the *Upaniṣad*; it was developed in Jainism and Buddhism.

ainos (gr.): story, tale.

akribia (gr.): zeal, rigour.

alētheia (gr.): truth.

anātmavāda, *nairātmyavāda*: mainly Buddhist doctrine of the insubstantiality of the *ātman* or Self.

antistēnai (gr.): opposition, resistance

anumāna: inference, logical deduction.

anupalabdhī: non-recognition, that which opens us up to freedom.

apauruṣeya: theory according to which the *Veda* have no author, although the inspired *ṛṣi* are tools of revelation. In the beginning was the Word: *vac*.

aporia (gr.): difficulty which halts the argument, no way out.

arthāpatti: implication, what is supposed or presumed.

āśram (*a*): spiritual community, usually under the direction of a guru or spiritual master. It means also a stage in human life.

ātman: the "self" of human being or of reality. Ontological nucleus in Hinduism and totally impermanent in Buddhism.

Aufhebung (germ.): "surpassing"; in Hegelian philosophy it means both "transcend" and "preserve," i.e., one of the opposite meanings is part of a process by which something or some position is negated to give place to another aspect, in which, nevertheless, the first is not fully lost.

avidyā: ignorance, nescience, absence of true and liberating knowledge, often identified with *māya* and a cause of illusion and delusion.

ayus: vital force, vitality, life, temporal existence, the human being's lifespan.

bodhisattva: the enlightened one; he who having reached the liberation on earth, is committed to helping all other beings to obtain liberation.

brahman: Absolute reality, one and identical to the *ātman* (according to some schools), foundation of everything.

Buddhakāya: universal solidarity, Buddha's behavior.

catachronic: judgment of large portions of the past based on the criterion of the present.

dabar (heb.): word.

Dhammapāda (pali): collection of 426 Buddhist verses of the Pali Canon.

dharma: cosmic order, justice, religion, morality.

dharma-samānvaya: harmonization, convergence, the meeting of all *dharma*s.

diakonia tou logou (gr.): ministry of the word.

dīn (*daena*) (arab.): religion.

Ding an sich (germ.): the thing in itself.

eidetic (gr.): related to knowledge; from *eidōs*, idea.

ekam evādvītiyam: one and many, unity and multiplicity.

epistēmē (gr.): science.

Ganeśa: divine figure with the head of an elephant, leader of the divinities comprising the retinue of Śiva.

Gestalt (germ.): figure, form.

Gītā (*Bhagavad-gītā*): The "song of the Glorious Lord," the most known sacred text in India, included in the *Mahabharata* (often called the "New Testament of Hinduism").

goy (heb.): pagan.

hen (gr.): one, unit.

hen kai polla (gr.): one and many, unity and multiplicity.

Hindic: refers to the culture of the subcontinent of South-East Asia, while "Indian" is used in reference to India as a modern nation.

Holistic: considering reality in its wholeness.

homeomorphic: that which performs a similar function in another system.

jīvanmukta: "liberated while alive and embodied," the highest category of the holy or fulfilled person who has reached the destination in this life and, therefore, in the human body, he who has fulfilled his *ātman-brahmā* ontological identity, he who has reached his own being, becoming totally integrated.

jñāna: knowledge.

karman or *karma*: "action," in origin the sacred action, the sacrifice, then even moral act: the result of all actions according to the law of *karma* which rules the actions and its results in the universe.

karuṇā: compassion, comprehension; an important concept in Buddhism.

kat'exochēn (gr.): in the true core of reality.

kerygma (gr.): message, proclamation (of the word of God), from the Greek *kerysso* (to proclaim), corresponding to the first level of the evangelical teaching.

koinonia (gr.): community, communion.

Körper (ger.): abstract body, including theoretical, e.g., a collection of rules, while *Leib* refers to the living body, including that of animals.

khaṣīr (arab.): infidel.

Kṛṣṇa: *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (literally "black"); one of the most popular Gods. It is he who has given the revelation to Arjuna in the *Gītā*.

ḷṣatriya: priest.

- Mahābhārata*: epic poem telling about Indian people and its own normative values.
- mahatma*: "great soul." Name of the founder of the Jain religion (4th-5th Century B.C.).
- māyā*: the mysterious power, wisdom, or ability of the Gods, hence the power of deceit, of illusion. In the Vedānta it is used as a synonym of ignorance and also to indicate the cosmic "illusion" that shrouds the absolute brahman.
- metanoia* (gr.): radical change, overcoming the mental.
- mikrotheos* (gr.): indicates the entire divinity epitomized in the human being, just as the expression "human being as *mikrocosmos*" indicates the human being as compendium of the cosmos.
- miṇṇāṇsā*: Vedic philosophical school focussed on the exegesis of the texts.
- mithuna*: union both sexual and metaphysical.
- moira* (gr.): fate, destiny.
- naiṣkarmya karma*: innocent action.
- nirvāṇa*: "extinction"; liberation from every limitation; ultimate liberation for Buddhism and Jainism.
- noēma* (gr.): in the phenomenology of Husserl the unit of intellectual perception.
- nous*: (gr.): mind, comprehension, thought.
- oikonomia*: (gr.): science of the administration of the family (human family). Order of human *habitat*, economics.
- oikos* (gr.): home, homeland.
- oikoumenē* (gr.): the inhabited earth, the known world and, therefore, the universe.
- ontomony* (gr.): intrinsic connection of an entity in relation to the totality of Being, the constitutive order (*nomos*) of every being (*on*) as Being, harmony which allows the inter-in-dependence of everything.
- pañḍit*: erudite.
- panlogismo*: the "totalitarian rationalism" of the Hegelian concept, which interprets all reality as a rational moment of the universal process of the idea.
- perichōrēsis* (gr.): concept of the Christian Trinity describing the interpenetration of the divine persons.
- pisteuma* (gr.): from *pisteuo*, to believe; that which the believer believes, the intentional sense of religious phenomena, the homeomorphic equivalent of *noema polysemic*—(gr.) having different meanings.
- Prajāpati*: "God of creatures," the primordial God, Father of the Gods and all beings.
- prajña*: comprehension and awareness, knowledge, wisdom.
- pramāṇavāda*: doctrine of means of knowledge.
- pramaṇa*: criterion on truth mutually accepted.
- pukka*: typically Anglo-Indian adjective, meaning authentic, first-rate.
- Puruṣa*: the archetype, original man, the person; it is both the primordial man of cosmic dimensions and the spiritual being and interior man.
- Ṛg-veda*: the most ancient and important of the *Vedas*.
- ṛṣi*: seer, sage, wise man; the poet-sages to whom the *Vedas* were revealed.
- ṛta*: cosmic and sacred order, sacrifice as a universal law, also truth; the ultimate, dynamic and harmonious structure of reality.
- śabda*: sound, word, he who speaks with authority.

samlekhana: ritual fast which gradually leads to death.

saṃskāra: preparatory rites of purification; causal seeds of action engendered by impressions in the mental substance.

Śaṅkarācārya or *Śaṅkara*: VIII century philosopher and master; one of the leader of the non-dualistic Vedānta philosophy.

saṃgha: community, spiritual congregation, assembly, the (monastic) community of those who follow the path of the Buddha.

Sanātana-dharma: "law, eternal, imperishable religion," the name that Hinduism gives itself on the grounds of having neither founder nor temporal origin; the self-understanding of traditional religiousness in India.

sarvam sarvātmakam: all in all.

Śiva: one of the most important gods of Hinduism.

Śivaita: follower of Śaivism, one of the two great families of the Hindu religion, whose God is Śiva.

śruti: "I listen"; the sacred texts of the Vedic revelation were compiled by the ancient *ṛṣi*, who would "hear" them.

sūnyatā: empty, nonconsistency of illusory things.

sūtra: aphoristic text that generally can not be understood without a comment.

svadharma: personal intrinsic order.

tao (chin.): "way," a central concept in Chinese philosophy, especially in Taoism.

tapas: heat; hence inner energy, spiritual fervor or ardor, austerity, asceticism. *theologoumenon* (gr.): theological enunciation, the expression of a theological belief.

trika: fundamental concept of the Śaivism in Kashmir regarding the triadic structure of the universe.

uji (jap.): neologism introduced by Dogen in his main work, *Shōbōgenzō*, usually translated with "time-being" or with "being-time." It could be in relation with the notion of temporality.

upamāna: comparison, one of the "means of knowledge" (*pramāṇa*).

Upaniṣad: sacred texts forming the last part of the Vedas.

Vedānta: end of the Vedas or one of the last philosophical schools in the Hindu tradition with some of the most important Hindu philosophers Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Mādhva.

Vedas: the entire body of "sacred Scriptures" of Hinduism (although originally they were only passed on orally). Strictly speaking, "*Veda*" refers only to the *Śaṅkhita* (*Rg-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, *Sāma-veda*, *Atharva-veda*).

Vimalakīrtinīrdeśa: Buddhist text.

Viṣṇu: "the doer," one of the most important divinities in Hinduism.

viṣṇuīte: follower of Viṣṇuism, one of the three great religious orientations in Hinduism.

vyavaharika: "relating to earthly matters, to mundane life," i.e., the earthly way of seeing, the practical perspective; the relative level.

Zeitgeist (germ.): spirit of the time, cultural and spiritual atmosphere of a specific era.

Index of Original Texts in This Volume

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The Italian texts were translated into English by Clarissa Balaszkeskul-Hawes, and the English texts were reviewed by Geraldine Clarkson.

INDEX OF NAMES

- Abhinavagupta, 62
 Abraham (OT), 11, 67, 68, 104, 145
 Akbar, 12, 87
 Albert, H., 27
 Alexander the Great, 3, 12, 67
 Allende, Salvador, 192
 Aquinas, Thomas, 36, 62, 70, 74,
 86, 88, 91, 142, 154, 158, 178
 Archytas of Taranto, 190
 Aristotle, 15, 36, 38, 129,
 132, 177, 192, 204
 Arjuna, 6
 Aśoka, 13, 151, 212
 Augustine, 14, 46, 129, 132,
 134, 137, 142, 155
 Aurobindo Ghose, 62
 Averroes, 62

 Bacon, Francis, 29
 Basil of Caesarea, 142
 Bonaventure, 46
 Buber, Martin, 182n28
 Buddha, 12, 98, 112, 142, 209

 Capello, F., 75
 Chesterton, G. K., 158
 Chilon, 133
 Christ, 36, 51, 67, 69, 71–73, 75–78,
 81–83, 86, 89, 90, 97, 104–5, 106, 114,
 115, 122, 142, 156, 158, 207, 208, 209,
 212. *See also Jesus*
Chuang Tzu, 117
Churchill, Winston, 12
Cicero, 29, 192
 Clinton, Bill, 186
 Columbus, Christopher, 37, 82
 Comenius, 35
 Condillac, 29
 Confucius, 49, 152
 Constantine, 88, 104
 Copernicus, 68, 121
 Cousin, Victor, 96

 Damian, Peter, 37
 Dante Alighieri, 49
 Davidson, D., 27
 de Lubac, H., 92n5
 Descartes, René, 13, 23, 73,
 122–23, 128, 148, 196, 202
 de Vallescar, D., 163n5
 Diène, Doudou, 159n2
 Diogenes Laertius, 96
 Dionysius the Areopagite, 135
 Dogen Zenji, 164

 Eckhart, Meister, 204
 Einstein, Albert, 44
 Eliot, T. S., 144
 Empedocles, 137
 Erasmus of Rotterdam, 13, 95, 197, 210,
 212

 Fernando el Católico, 13
 Fernet-Betancourt, R., 178n25
 Francis of Assisi, 153

 Galilei, Galileo, 121, 166, 190
 Gandhi, Mahātmā, 12, 51, 87, 90, 157,
 169, 192, 195
 Geertz, Clifford, 138
 Genghis Kahn, 67
 Gödel, K., 36
 Goethe, J. W., 209
 Gonzalez Gil, M. M., 195n36

 Haddad, Mohammed, 105n1
 Hartmann, N., 183
 Hazrat Inayat Khan, 91
 Hegel, G. W. F., 34, 43, 96, 151, 202
 Heidegger, Martin, 29
 Heisenberg, Werner, 36, 73, 187
 Heraclitus, 24, 29
 Hobbes, Thomas, 190, 197
 Homer, 144
 Hugh of St. Victor, 26
 Hundt, Leipzig Magnus, 132

Husserl, E. G., 134, 202

Ibn Khaldūn, 6

Ibn Sina (Avicenna), 204

Ibsen, H., 49

Isaac Israeli, 191

Jacob (OT), 24

James (saint), 49

James, William, 5, 27

Jaspers, K., 74

Jesus, 12, 20–21, 22, 51, 67, 69–70, 86,
87, 129, 140, 145, 168

Job, 6

John (apostle), 78, 86, 90, 158, 192

John the Baptist, 69

John of the Cross, 49

John Paul II, 47, 112

Juan de Austria, 13

Judas Iscariot, 192

Juvenal, 142

Kant, Immanuel, xi, 27, 73, 195n35, 202

Kennedy, John F., 179

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 192

Lao-Tze, 49, 200

Laplace, P. R., 24

Larson, Gerald James, 26, 34–36, 38

Laski, 27

Lehman, K., 87–88

Leibniz, G. W., 132

Leopardi, G. 144

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 187

Lévy-Bruhl, L., 187

Llull, Ramon, 13, 159, 172, 174–75

Luther, Martin, 29, 62

Maimonides, Moses, 34

Mao Tze-tung, 183

Marcus Aurelius, 192

Marx, Karl, 62

Mary (Mother of God), 69

Matthew (apostle), 22

Mendelev, D. I., 41

Moses (OT), 6, 68, 104, 128

Muhammad, 47

Murti, T. R. V., 34

Nāgārjuna, 13, 34, 61

Napoleon, 12, 67

Newman, John Henry, 62

Newton, Isaac, 121

Nicholas of Cusa, 13, 135, 137, 177

Nicolescu, Barasab, 163n4

Nietzsche, F., 29, 183

Novalis, 144

Origen of Alexandria, 36

Ortega y Gasset, Jose, 49

Parmenides, 24, 44, 91, 128, 141, 151, 169

Pascal, Blaise, 49

Paul of Tarsus, 8, 36, 67, 91, 156

Paul VI, 86

Peter (apostle), 106

Philo, 68

Pico della Mirandola, 13, 138

Pindar, 212

Plato, 8, 27, 56, 117, 127, 133,

137, 147, 190, 203

Plotinus, 137

Plutarch, 95

Porphry, 38

Potamon of Alexandria, 96

Prajāpati, 202

Proclo, 23

Protagoras, 127

Pythagoras, 158, 190

Qays ben Sayfi, 6

Radhakrishnan, S., 74

Rahner, Karl, 77, 83

Ramanuja, 62

Riccardo di San Vittore (Richard

of Saint Victor), 86, 135

Russell, Bertrand, 5, 7, 27

Ryle, Gilbert, 5

Said, Edward W., 203n40

Sākhya, 29

Sankara (Sankaracarya), 28n4, 178

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 183

Scheler, M. 27

Schelling, F., 202

Schiller, J. C. F. 27

Scotus, John, 62

Seneca, 192

Shakespeare, William, 49

Shankara, 36, 62

- Śiva, 22
Socrates, 12, 29, 133, 147, 158
Solzhenitsyn, A., 155
Spinoza, B., 197
Stagirita, 177
Symeon the New Theologian, 155

Teresa of Ávila, 145
Tertullian, 178n24
Thamus, 127

Vallescar, D. de, 163n5
Varro, M. T., 88
Vegezio, P. Flavio Renato, 212
Vives, Juan Luis, 13, 138

Weil, Simone, 51, 207
Wilson, Woodrow, 192
Wolff, Ch., 27

Zhuang-zi, 146
Zubiri, X., 138

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An international authority on spirituality, the study of religions, and intercultural dialogue, Raimon Panikkar made intercultural and dialogical pluralism one of the hallmarks of his research, becoming a master "bridge builder," tireless in the promotion of dialogue between Western culture and the great Oriental Hindū and Buddhist traditions.

Born in 1918 in Barcelona of a Spanish Catholic mother and an Indian Hindū father, he was part of a plurality of traditions: Indian and European, Hindū and Christian, scientific and humanistic.

Panikkar held degrees in chemistry, philosophy, and theology, and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1946. He delivered courses and lectures in major European, Indian, and American universities.

A member of the International Institute of Philosophy (Paris), of the permanent Tribunal of the Peoples (Rome), and of the UNESCO Commission for intercultural dialogue, he also founded various philosophical journals and intercultural study centers. He has held conferences in each of the five continents (including the renowned Gifford Lectures in 1988–1989 on "Trinity and Atheism").

Panikkar received international recognitions including honorary doctorates from the University of the Balearic Islands in 1997, the University of Tübingen in 2004, Urbino in 2005, and Girona in 2008, as well as prizes ranging from the "Premio Menéndez Pelayo de Humanidades" for his book *El concepto de naturaleza* in Madrid in 1946 to the "Premio Nonino 2001 a un maestro del nostro tempo" in Italy.

Panikkar lived in Tavertet in the Catalanian mountains, where he continued his contemplative experience and cultural activities, from 1982 until his death on August 26, 2010. There he founded and presided over the intercultural study center Vivarium. Panikkar published more than fifty books in various languages and hundreds of articles on the philosophy of religion, theology, the philosophy of science, metaphysics, and Indology.

From the dialogue between religions to the peaceful cohabitation of peoples; from reflections on the future of the technological society to major work on political and social intelligence; from the recognition that all interreligious dialogue is based on an intrareligious dialogue to the promotion of open knowledge of other religions, of which he is a mediator; from his penetrating analysis of the crisis in spirituality to the practice of meditation and the rediscovery of his monastic identity; from the invitation of *colligite fragmenta* as a path toward the integration of reality to the proposal of a new innocence, Panikkar embodies a personal journey of fulfillment.

Among his most important publications with Orbis are: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973); *Worship and Secular Man* (1973); *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1981); *The Silence of God* (1989); *The Rythym of Being* (1989); *Cosmotheandric Experience* (1993); *Christophany* (2004).

